Illustrated Guide
to the

National Postal Museum

National
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Smithsonian Institution
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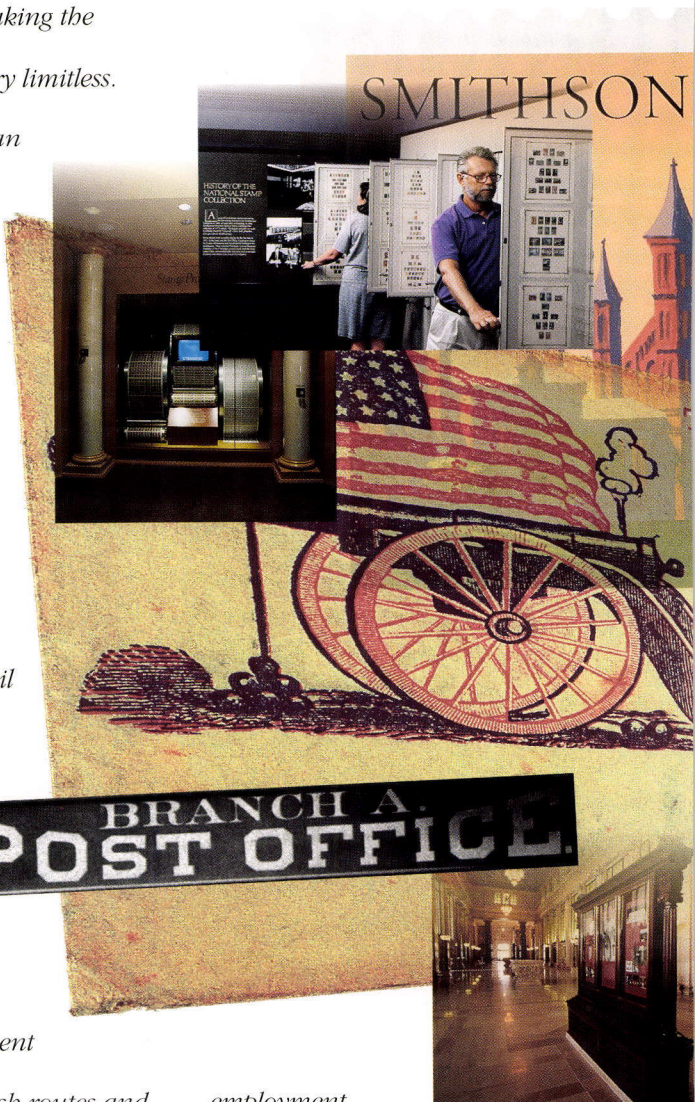
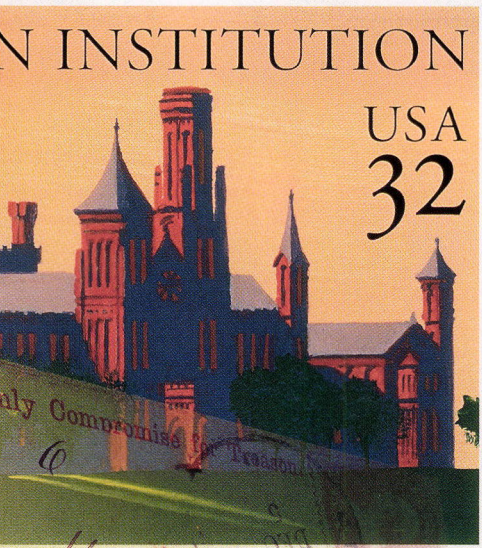
Mail touches everyone, making the boundaries of postal history limitless. America's postal history can be defined through the use of objects as small as stamps and as mammoth as airplanes. It is expressed in heartrending letters from soldiers on foreign battlefields and through the explosion of direct mail marketing. America's postal service was the force behind the creation of commercial aviation. It helped push the development of cross-country stagecoach routes and railroads. It ensured the development and perpetual maintenance of rural roads. The postal service was where thousands of African Americans were first able to obtain government employment. America's postal history is the story of the people who made the service work and those who used it. It is the history of mail and the American people.





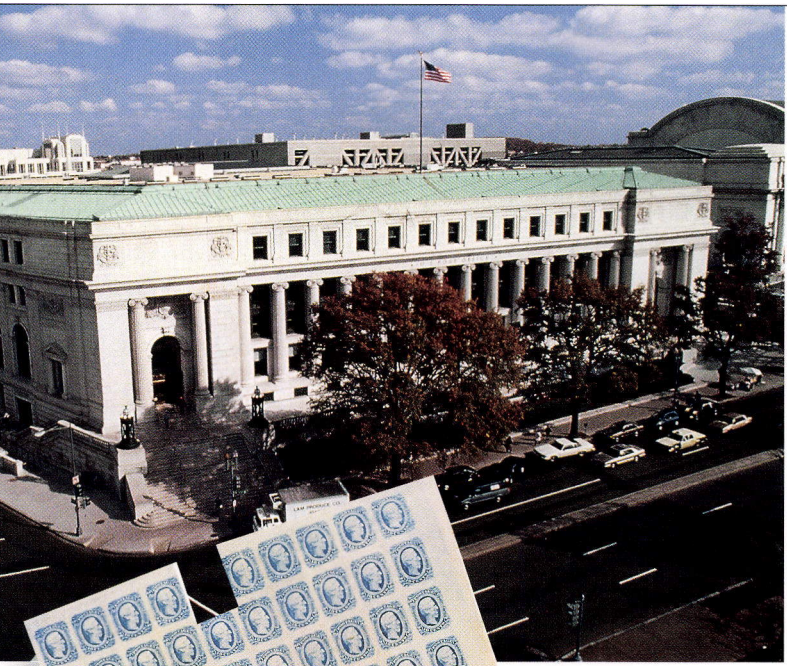
Museums have changed. This evolutionary process began a few decades ago when curators started treating museum artifacts in a whole new way. Traditionally, artifacts placed on display were inadequately described. The scant captions typically only identified what an object was and when it was used. Its real importance—how it positively or negatively affected our lives—was simply ignored.

Now museum artifacts are more than three-dimensional icons. Now our expanded study and interpretations of them allow us to discuss how our lives have been changed, for better or worse, by our use or our rejection of them. In doing this, museums in general have moved away from being places where the sacred "stuff" of centuries past resides in antiseptic showcases, to becoming places that encourage historical and cultural debate. And, as a part of this process, museums also have become more educational and more entertaining. And, at last, they are becoming more child friendly. Museums have changed. And they need to continue to change in the future to better serve the American people.

The National Postal Museum is on the cutting edge of that change. This museum will continue to do things a little differently. We will continue to devise innovative exhibition techniques, to interpret artifacts better, and to offer diverse and interesting public programs. This commitment to positive change will enable us to better serve all those who come here to be educated and entertained. We hope that you enjoy this visual visit to the National Postal Museum.

— James H. Bruns, Director

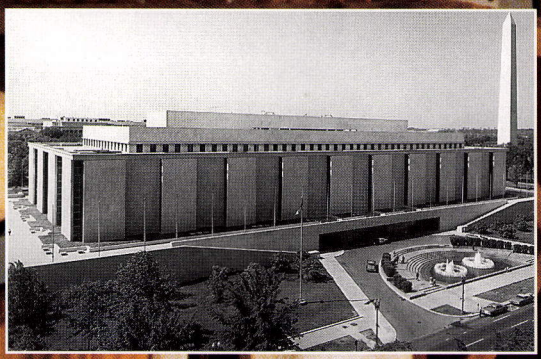
This ornate historic lobby formerly served as the main service area of the City Post Office Building. By the 1970s, this area was modernized to an unrecognizable point, a hodgepodge of Formica™ and harsh fluorescent lighting. Painstaking renovation, begun in 1989, restored every foot of the lobby to its original glamor. Today the lobby is the foyer to the National Postal Museum.



◀ **The National Postal Museum** opened on July 30, 1993. Located on Capitol Hill, the museum is housed in the Old City Post Office Building. The building, designed by Daniel Burnham, was built between 1911 and 1914. It is a classic Beaux Arts-style structure that compliments its next door neighbor, the Burnham–designed Union Station. The museum has 23,000 square feet of exhibition space, a research library, a postal store and philatelic center, and a museum shop.

◀ The Smithsonian Institution's stamp collection dates back to the donation of this pane of 10–cent Confederate stamps in 1886. These stamps helped form the nucleus of what is now the world's largest postal history collection.

▼ In 1964 the philatelic collection moved into what is now known as the National Museum of American History. On November 6, 1990, officials from the Smithsonian Institution and the United States Postal Service signed an agreement creating the National Postal Museum. In a span of just 100 years, the collection had grown to over 16 million stamps and postal history artifacts.



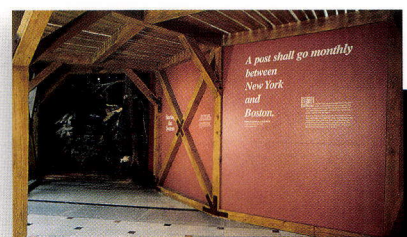
The National Postal Museum is divided into six galleries that explore America's postal history from colonial times to the present. The galleries show how mail has been transported, emphasize the importance of letters, and spotlight the creation and wondrous diversity of postage stamps.

◀ Today objects from this wide-ranging collection cover 20,000 square feet of exhibit-space. Because of the collection's enormous size, only a fraction of it can be displayed at any given time. Through new exhibits and a regular rotation of philatelic materials, visitors are able to see something new and different on each return visit.

Binding the

George Washington envisioned a nation bound together by a system of post roads and post offices. Binding the Nation *documents America's increasing need for a mail system to ensure the free flow of information between citizens and their government. As pioneers pushed out the nation's borders, they demanded regular mail service that would conquer physical boundaries and maintain their ties to the world left behind.*

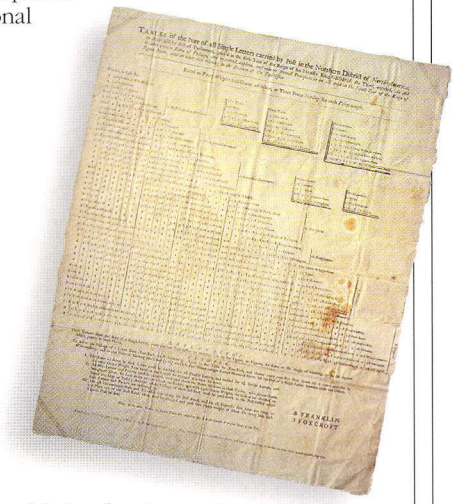
Visitors entering *Binding the Nation* first pass through a setting that represents the nation's first post road. Lone postal riders carried mail along such a desolate road between Boston and New York in 1673. The mail they carried was by and large for official business, not personal correspondence. The British government needed a reliable mail service throughout its American colonies for official communications. ▼



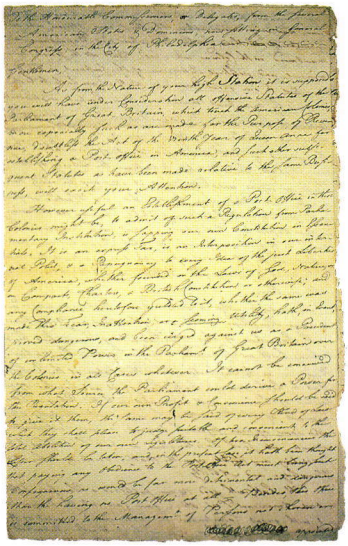
Nation

▲ Benjamin Franklin brought order to the disorganized British colonial post. In 1753 Franklin became the Crown's joint postmaster general for the American colonies. He moved quickly to improve the fledgling service, organizing a weekly mail wagon service between Philadelphia and Boston. His postal riders soon were traveling day and night by horseback in relays, using lanterns to light their way. Franklin's improvements cut mail delivery time between the cities in half, making the colonial post both efficient for colonists and profitable for the Crown.

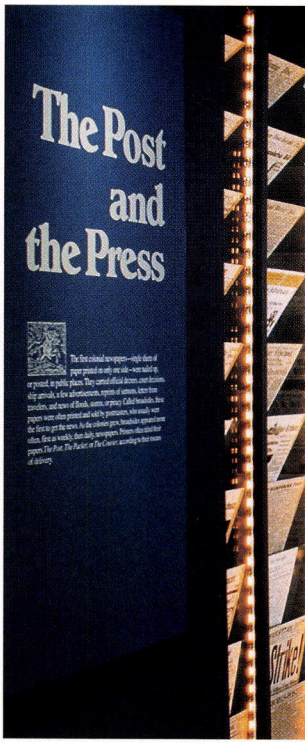
▲ The gallery's first exhibit features changing manuscripts and artifacts from the earliest years of America's postal system. Materials in this exhibit show that the creation and growth of the postal service was critical to the development of a national identity.



Among Franklin's other innovations was the creation of a rate chart for postmasters to use in determining postage rates between towns. He based the cost of sending a letter on distance and weight and converted the original British currency rates to the pennyweights of colonial currency. ▲

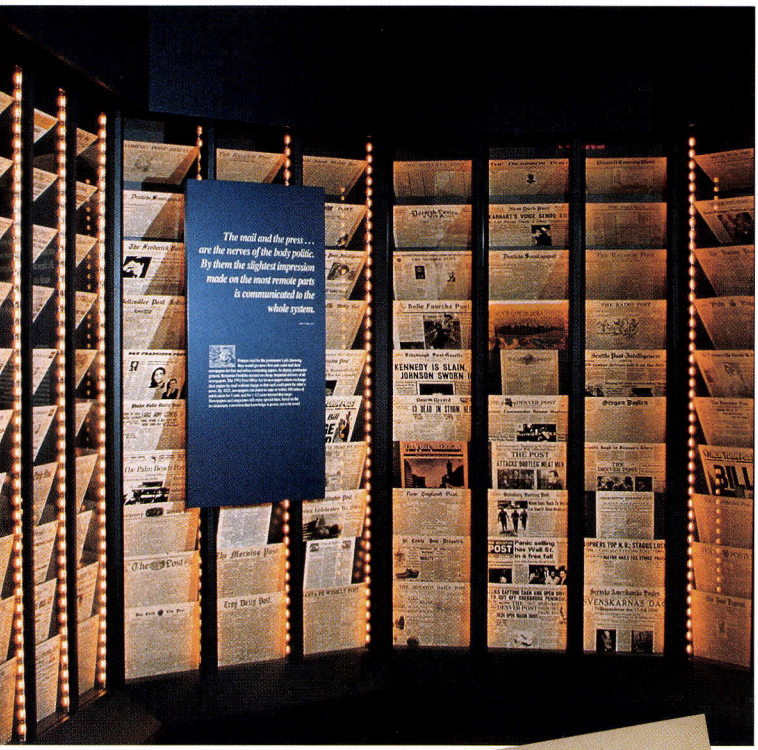


▲ A printer named William Goddard also helped lay the groundwork for America's postal service. In this 1774 petition to the Continental Congress, Goddard argued for the establishment of an American post office to be founded on constitutional principle. Goddard's constitutional post became quite popular with the colonists. Many used it instead of the Crown's postal service, in part to avoid the prying eyes of British postal officials.

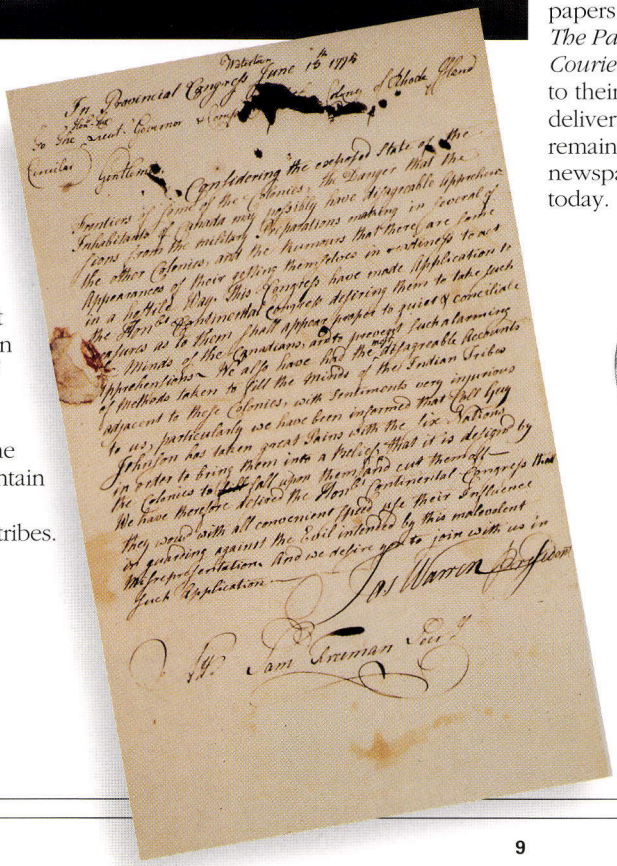


Congress shall have Power . . . to establish Post Offices and Post Roads.

Constitution of the United States,
Article 1, Section VIII


The mail and the press... are the nerves of the body politic. By them the slightest impression made on the most remote parts is communicated to the whole system.
KENNEDY IS SLAIN, JOHNSON SWORN IN
THE POST
ATTACKS BOTTLED MEAT MEN
POST Panic selling has Wall St. in a free fall

◀ The framers of the constitution maintained a keen belief in the vital connection between information and reasoned debate. Americans were quick to take up the business of distributing — and occasionally creating — the news. The first colonial newspapers, called broadsides, were often printed and sold by post-masters, who usually were the first to get the news. As the colonies grew, broadsides appeared more often, first as weekly, then daily, newspapers. Printers often titled their papers *The Post, The Packet,* or *The Courier,* according to their means of delivery. *Post* remains a popular newspaper title today.

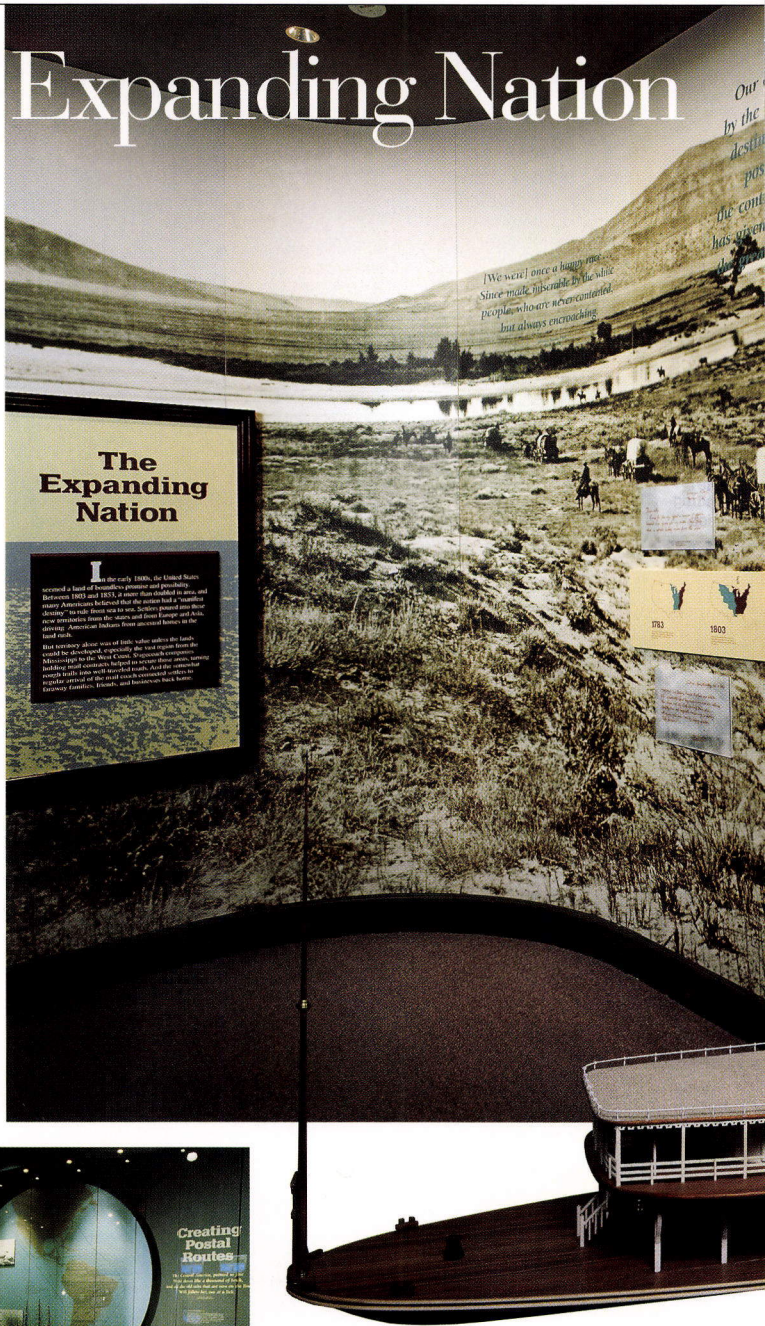


▶ This letter was written to the Rhode Island legislature on June 15, 1775 by Joseph Warren. It is the only known surviving Constitutional Post endorsement on a letter. Warren was a member of the Boston Sons of Liberty. In his letter, he urged the legislature to maintain peace with the American Indian tribes.

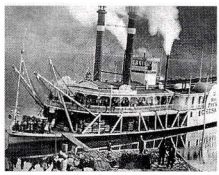
The Expanding Nation

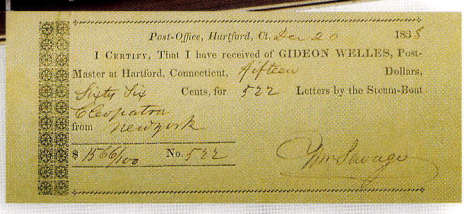
Conquering American geography wasn't easy before airplanes and railroads made transcontinental travel commonplace. Many early postal routes followed the path of least resistance—water. In 1823 Congress declared all steamboat routes to be post roads. Boats carried mail on the rivers and lakes of our country, while clipper ships and steamboats sailed two oceans to bind the East and West Coasts.

The map below on the left shows U.S. river and rail routes in 1860. The map of the Americas traces both the three–month–long route around the tip of Cape Horn and the shorter route across Central America. ▼



Leaving the colonial gallery, museum visitors follow a unique timeline into 19th century America. Letters sent from new American territories chart the nation's growth.

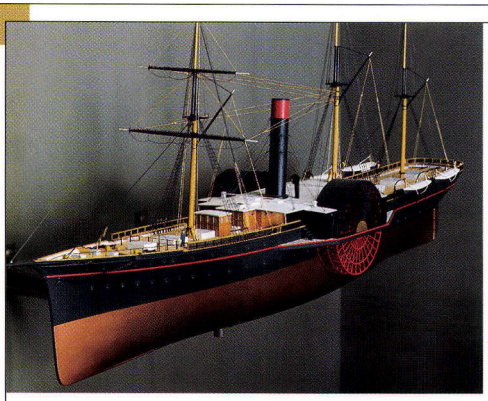



Post-Office, Hartford, Ct. Dec 20 1853

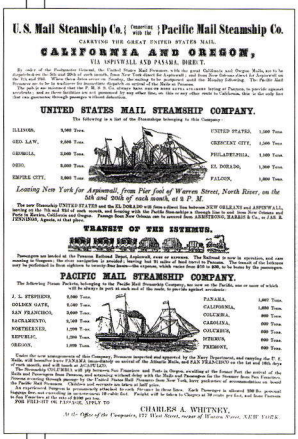
I Certify, That I have received of GIDEON WELLES, Post-Master at Hartford, Connecticut, Fifteen Dollars, Sixty Six Cents, for 522 Letters by the Steam-Boat Cleopatra from New York

$ 15.66/100 No 522

▲ Steamship owners did not make much money from their mail contracts. A typical ship might receive $4.00 for carrying the mail 150 miles, the same price as a cabin passenger's ticket. Weather and accidents delayed service, and steamboat captains found it hard to stick to the regular schedules demanded in postal contracts. Many captains also diverted money from the postal coffers by carrying mail privately for a fee.



▲ Responding to the jump in demand for mail service following the 1848 California gold discovery, coastal steamers quickly became the central communication link between the East and West Coasts. They carried mail and passengers to Panama or Nicaragua, where all crossed by land to the opposite coast and boarded a second ship for the remainder of the journey.



U.S. Mail Steamship Co. | Connecting with the | Pacific Mail Steamship Co.

CARRYING THE GREAT UNITED STATES MAIL

CALIFORNIA AND OREGON,

VIA ASPINWALL AND PANAMA, DIRECT.

UNITED STATES MAIL STEAMSHIP COMPANY.

The following is a list of the Steamships belonging to this Company:

ILLINOIS,	3,000 Tons.	UNITED STATES,	1,500 Tons
OLD LAW,	2,000 Tons.	CRESCENT CITY,	1,500 Tons
GEORGIA,	2,000 Tons.	PHILADELPHIA,	1,500 Tons.
OHIO,	2,000 Tons.	EL DORADO,	1,500 Tons
EMPIRE CITY,	2,000 Tons.	FALCON,	1,000 Tons.

Leaving New York for Aspinwall, from Pier foot of Warren Street, North River, on the 5th and 20th of each month, at 3 P. M.

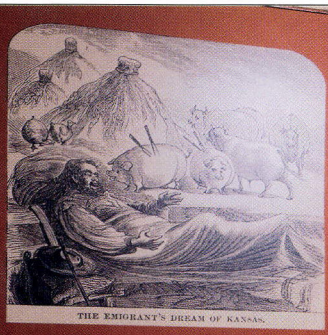
TRANSIT OF THE ISTHMUS.

PACIFIC MAIL STEAMSHIP COMPANY.

A. L. STIMERS,	3,000 Tons.	PANAMA,	1,000 Tons.
GOLDEN GATE,	3,000 Tons.	CALIFORNIA,	1,000 Tons.
SAN FRANCISCO,	2,000 Tons.	COLUMBIA,	800 Tons.
SACRAMENTO,	2,500 Tons.	CAROLINA,	800 Tons.
NORTHERNER,	1,200 Tons.	COLUMBUS,	800 Tons.
REPUBLIC,	1,200 Tons.	HERMAN,	800 Tons.
OREGON,	1,000 Tons.	FREMONT,	800 Tons.

CHARLES A. WHITNEY,

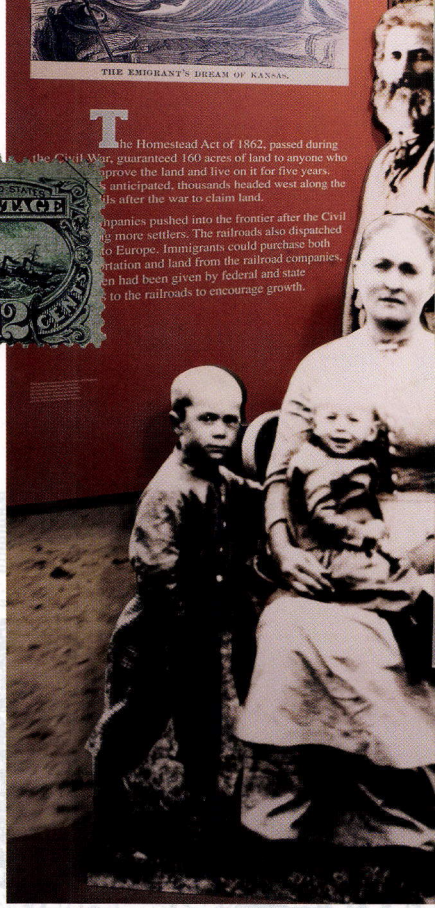
At the Office of the Company, 177 First Street, corner of Warren Street, NEW YORK.



THE EMIGRANT'S DREAM OF KANSAS.

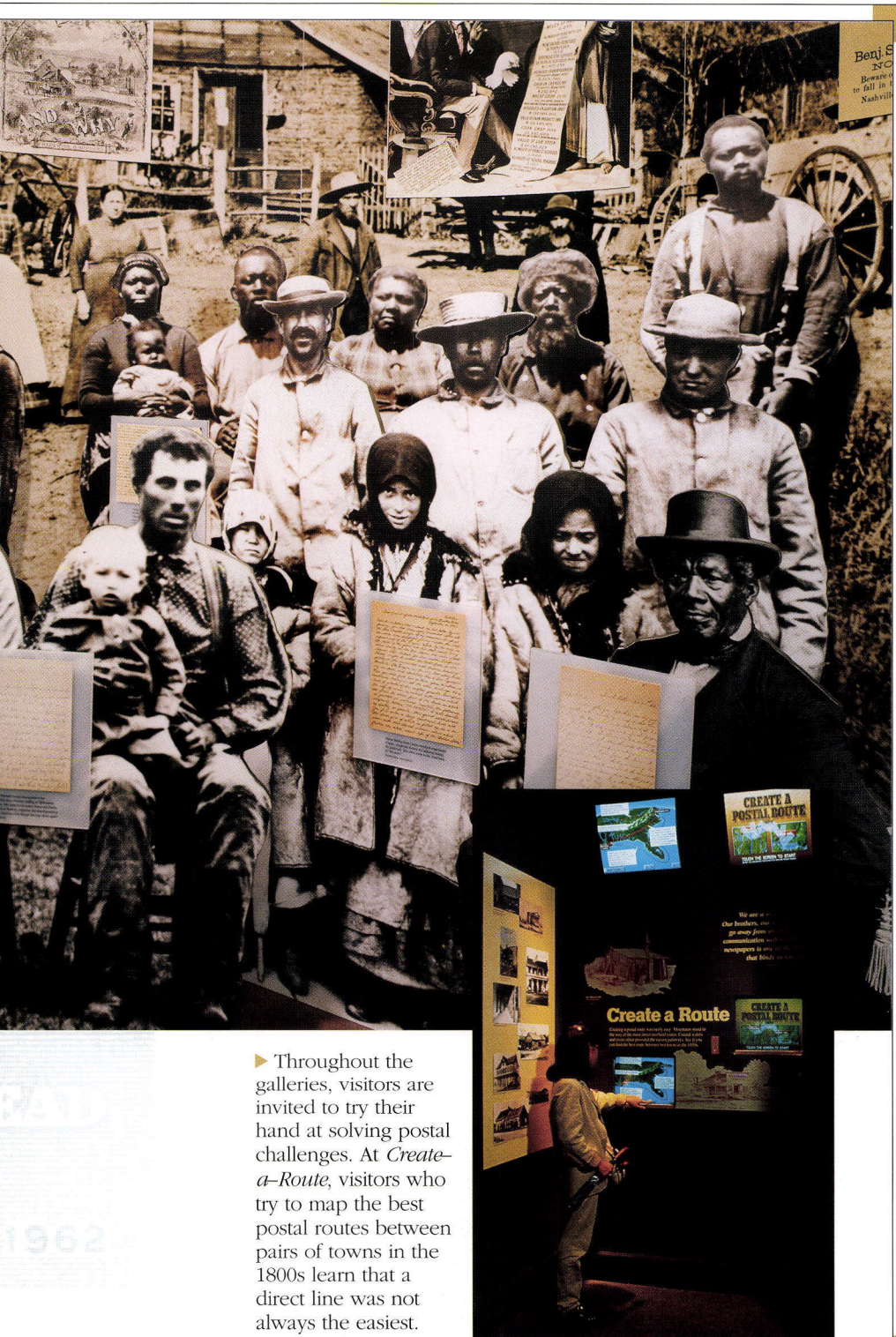
The Homestead Act of 1862, passed during the Civil War, guaranteed 160 acres of land to anyone who improve the land and live on it for five years. anticipated, thousands headed west along the ls after the war to claim land.

mpanies pushed into the frontier after the Civil more settlers. The railroads also dispatched to Europe. Immigrants could purchase both rtation and land from the railroad companies, en had been given by federal and state to the railroads to encourage growth.

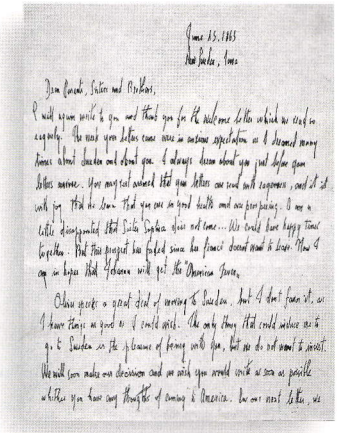


Steamships took settlers and mail to the West Coast, but did little to encourage immigration between the West Coast and the Mississippi River. To entice settlers into the Great Plains, Congress passed the Homestead Act of 1862. The promise of 160 acres of free land lured thousands of eager immigrants to the West.

In spite of their hunger for land, pioneers still wanted to feel connected to the rest of the country. Through mail contracts, Congress provided financial incentives to a growing number of stagecoach lines to create and maintain mail routes in the new territories.



▶ Throughout the galleries, visitors are invited to try their hand at solving postal challenges. At *Create-a-Route*, visitors who try to map the best postal routes between pairs of towns in the 1800s learn that a direct line was not always the easiest.



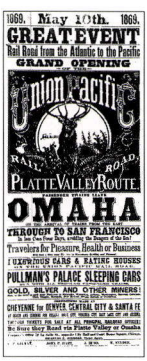
June 15, 1865
New Sweden, Iowa

Dear Parents, Sister and Brothers,

I will now write a few words to you in answer to your welcome letter which we received eagerly. The news your letters came were in extreme expectation as it seemed many months since I received that letter. I always dream about you and before your letters arrive. You may rest assured that your letters are read with eagerness, and it is with joy that we learn that you are in good health and are prospering. I am a little disappointed that Sister Sophia does not come... We would have happy times together. But this prospect has faded since her fiance doesn't want to leave. Now I am in hopes that Johanna will get the "American fever."

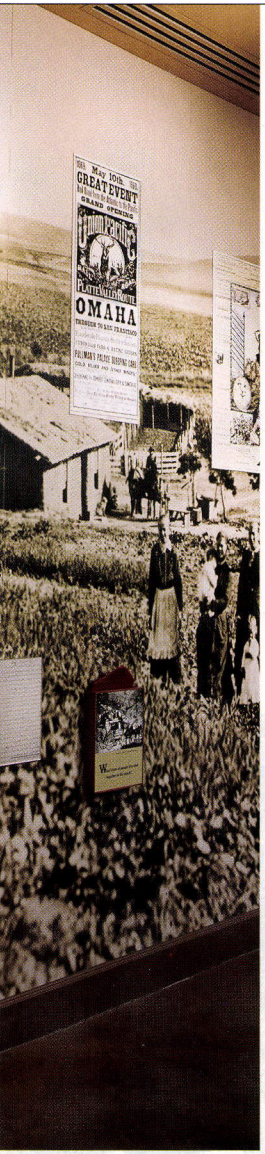
Others speak a great deal of coming to Sweden, but I don't know it, as I know things as good as it could with. The only thing that could induce me to go to Sweden is the pleasure of seeing you again, but we do not want to invest. We will soon make our decision and we wish you would write as soon as possible whether you have any thoughts of coming to America. In our next letter, we

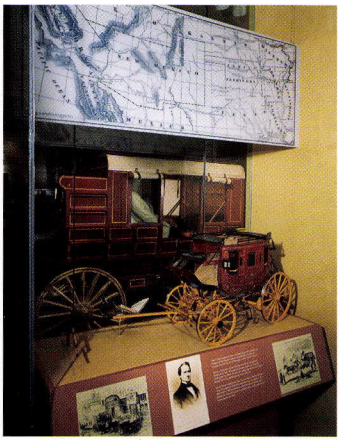
"You may rest assured that your letters are read with eagerness, and it is with joy that we learn that you are in good health and are prospering. I am a little disappointed that sister Sophia does not come—we would have happy times together. But this prospect has faded since her fiance doesn't want to leave. Now I am in hopes that Johanna will get the "American fever."



Your letters are r
with eagerne
Grit Sand!
WILLISTON
WILLISTON, BUFFALO CO., D AKOTA.
Now we and our fellow pioneers
were alone in a strange land;
our way to settle down in a far
about which we had only vague no

▲ During the 19th century, America's Postal Service was the primary medium of news and information. In this gallery, visitors encounter letters from some of the western pioneers. Mary Stevenson, a young Swedish woman, wrote to her family in 1865 and encouraged others to come to America.





▲ As Congress hoped, immigrants eager for a fresh start and land of their own poured across the overland trails after the Civil War. Private companies, enticed by federal mail contracts, strove to create and maintain mail routes in the new territories. The first to cover the territory between the Mississippi River and the West Coast was John Butterfield's Overland Stage, established in 1858. Butterfield's lucrative contract called for six years of semiweekly mail service at the unheard-of rate of $600,000 a year.

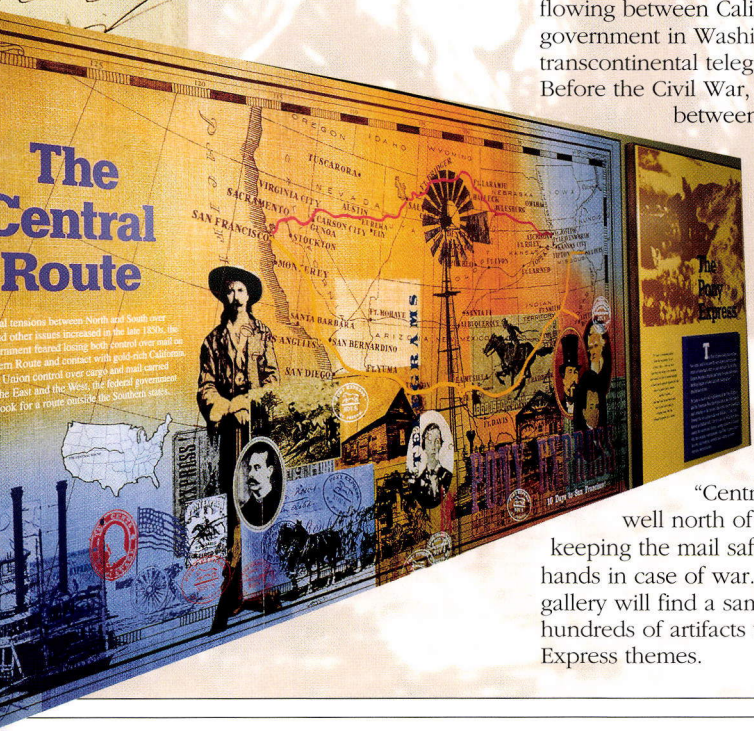
The arrival of stagecoaches that carried mail and passengers was a sign that the latest news would soon be available. This mud wagon is a replica of those that crisscrossed the western territories. The ride in these hard wagons over rough roads and dusty deserts or through frigid snows often tested the endurance of even the most seasoned traveler. The journey from Memphis, Tennessee, to San Francisco, California, routinely lasted twenty-five days. Travelers found themselves packed tightly into such wagons with up to eight people inside the coach, another eight or so on top, and mailbags stuffed in among the passengers. ▼

Pony Express

Known by many at the time simply as the pony, the Pony Express remains a dashing symbol of the Old West in America. Its mythic fame is out of proportion to its importance, for it lasted less than two years. Nevertheless, it remains one of the most familiar chapters of American postal history. The exploitation of the Pony Express and America's western frontier began late in the 19th century with the flood of romanticized Wild West shows and dime novels. Contemporary motion pictures and television programs about the Pony Express continue to provide drama, excitement, and a good deal of fantasy.

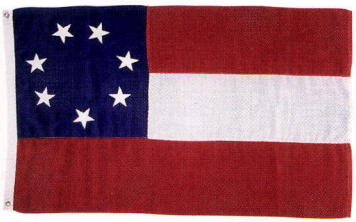
◀ This is a reproduction of one of the specially made Pony Express saddlebags, known as a mochilla. Letters wrapped in oil silk were placed in the mochilla pockets. When riders changed horses every ten to fifteen miles, they switched the mochilla from one saddle to the next. Each rider's route covered approximately seventy-five miles.

▲ This ten-cent U.S. Government-embossed envelope bears a $2.00 Wells, Fargo and Company Pony Express stamp and was sent from San Francisco to New York. The cover was postmarked with the famous "Running Pony" at San Francisco on June 12, 1861, and was carried by the Pony Express to St. Joseph, Missouri where it was placed in the regular mails for New York City.



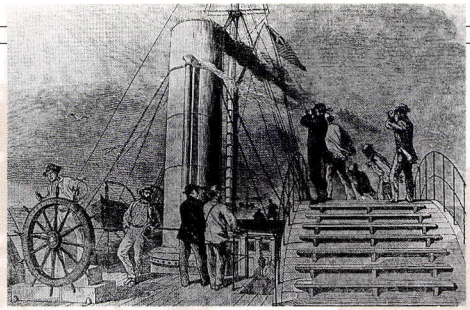
▲ In operation for a mere eighteen months, from April 1860 to October 1861, the Pony Express provided the quickest transit for letters and news between St. Joseph, Missouri, and San Francisco, California. It was established to keep information flowing between California and the federal government in Washington until the transcontinental telegraph was completed. Before the Civil War, as tension grew between Northern and Southern states, the U.S. government feared rebellious Southern states would take control of the only transcontinental mail line. Loss of that route would give the South the quickest and strongest connection to gold–rich California. The Pony Express's "Central" route would run well north of the Southern states, keeping the mail safely out of Southern hands in case of war. Visitors to this gallery will find a sampling from among hundreds of artifacts that trade on Pony Express themes.

A Nation Divided



▼ The onset of hostilities between the states was heralded by the South's attack on Fort Sumter, South Carolina, on April 12, 1861. The Civil War split the country and its postal service apart. The Confederate States of America established their own postal system headed by John Reagan. U.S. Postmaster General Montgomery Blair suspended federal postal service to the rebellious states on August 31, 1861. Northern postmasters were instructed to forward mail going to the Confederacy to the Dead Letter Office where undeliverable mail was collected and destroyed.

▶ For many soldiers, the Civil War brought their first experience of being away from home. This exhibit features letters exchanged by soldiers and their families, documents that speak to the loneliness and horrors of the conflict. Among the many artifacts used to represent the role of mail during the war is a Union Army field desk. Built to be moved quickly, the desk has pigeonholes to hold mail and writing implements and a lid that converts into a writing surface.

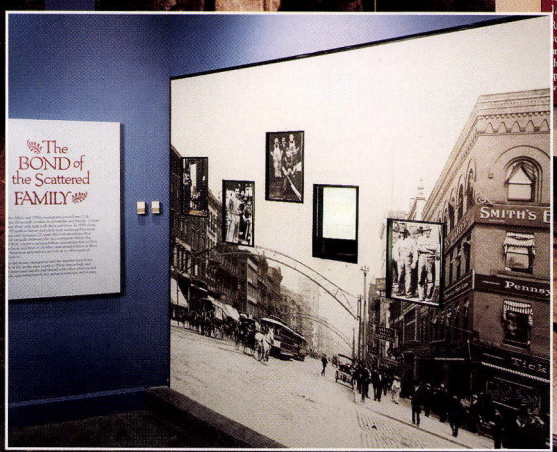


▲ Mail, like other cargo, moved through the Union blockade by ship. The ships carried mail through Bermuda, Cuba, and the West Indies. Because the Confederacy did not negotiate postal treaties with foreign governments, letters were carried commercially as private "ship" mail.

▲ (*Top*) Towards the end of the Civil War, Southerners faced increasing shortages of just about everything. Paper and envelopes were difficult to obtain, and some writers used whatever was available — the back of ledger sheets, as seen here, printed circulars, and even wallpaper.

▲ This is the original handwritten order to evacuate the records of the Confederate Post Office Department from Richmond, Virginia, on April 2, 1865. At that time, Richmond was serving as the capital of the Confederacy. When the war ended in 1865, the U.S. Post Office Department began to restore mail service to the former Confederate states, but the process was long and slow.

Customers &

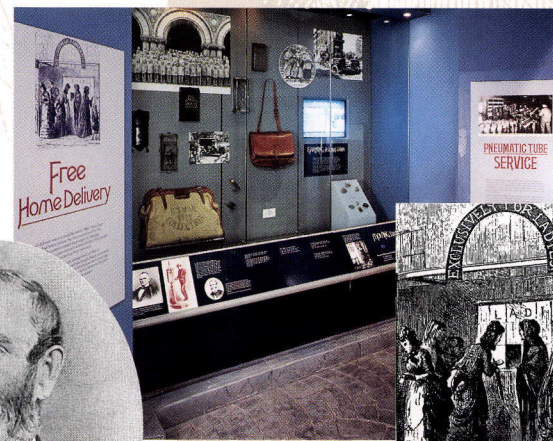


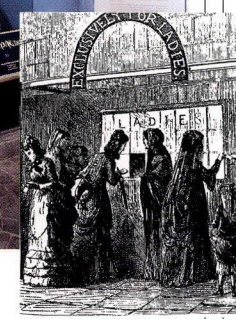
Many of the newest residents in American cities were recent immigrants. Letters were crucial to their lives, connecting immigrants first to their homelands and later to children and grandchildren as these new American generations moved on to other parts of this nation. Visitors can turn these immigrant photos to hear and read excerpts of letters from some of the many new Americans who relied upon the mail as a lifeline to loved ones back home.

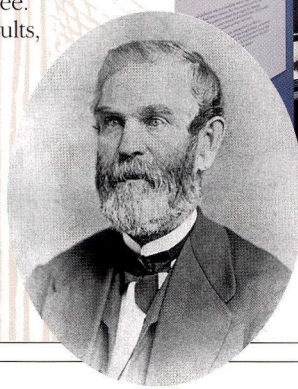
For most of the 19th century, the Post Office Department succeeded in delivering mail to Americans scattered across the new territories. By the 1880s, postal officials were faced with the challenge of improving mail service to individuals. The millions of newcomers who surged into cities posed unique obstacles to standard mail delivery as mail volume began to climb dramatically. Delivery to rural Americans was transformed as Rural Free Delivery flourished in the first decades of the 20th century. The mail these Americans were receiving began to change as well. By the end of the century, the explosion in direct mail marketing had changed the way America shopped.

Communities

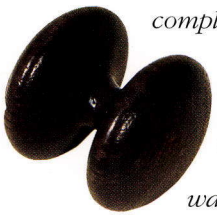
▶ City Free Delivery Service began during the Civil War in Cleveland, Ohio. Joseph Briggs, a postal employee, sympathized with women and children waiting in long lines at postal windows for letters from their loved ones at war. He convinced postal officials to deliver letters to the city's citizens for free. Encouraged by the results, postal officials tried to expand the service to other cities. By 1869 revenues from City Free Delivery were over ten times its cost, and the new system provided employment for Civil War veterans as letter carriers.







Letter carriers, who had to personally hand the mail over to the addressee,

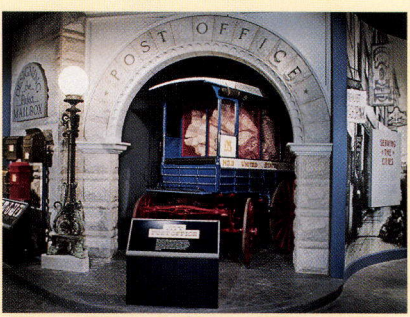


complained in 1916 that they spent almost two hours of their workday waiting for patrons to come to the door. Carriers used whistles or knocked on doors to announce their presence and some used wooden door knockers to save wear and tear on their knuckles. To save the carriers' time, the Post Office Department decided that every household must have a mail box or letter slot in order to receive mail.

Letter carriers have used leather satchels to tote America's mail since the beginning of city delivery service. By the 1980s, canvas bags began to replace the leather sacks. Carriers have loaded their satchels with all sorts and sizes of packages, carrying as much as seventy pounds of mail matter on their routes.

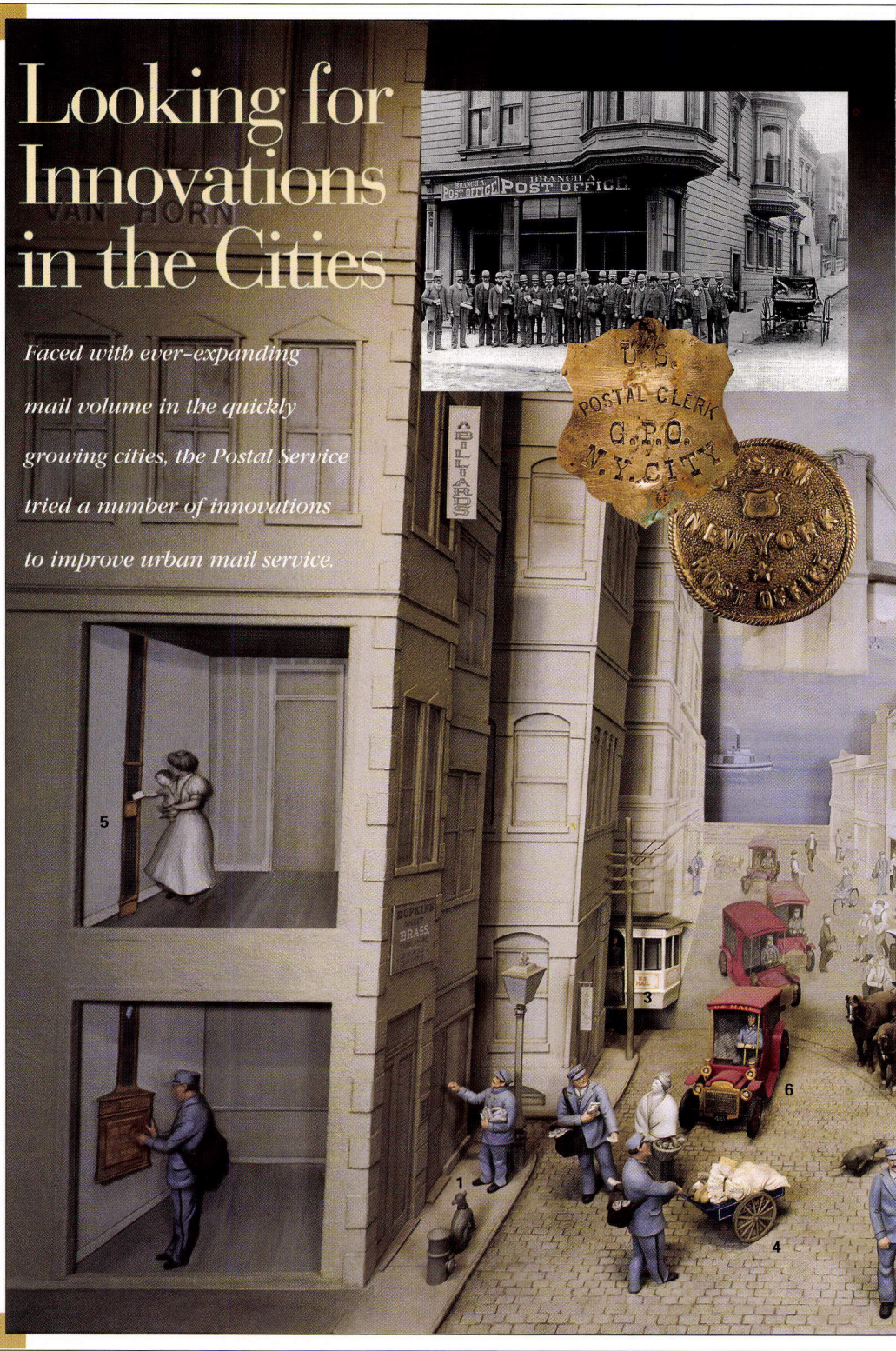
Hundreds of vehicles and processing technologies have been adapted and created to move the mail. But it is the postal workers we most readily associate with mail delivery. They are the public face of the Postal Service.

Protecting the mail is as important as carrying it. These homey, practical urban mail wagons, known as screen wagons, were introduced into service at Sherman, Texas, in 1886 in an effort to increase the security of mail being transported between post offices, branch offices, railroad stations, and even steamboat landings in certain cities. The Smithsonian acquired this fully restored screen wagon in 1987.



Looking for Innovations in the Cities

Faced with ever-expanding mail volume in the quickly growing cities, the Postal Service tried a number of innovations to improve urban mail service.



1 Home Delivery By the end of the 19th century, nearly 10,000 letter carriers were employed in over 400 cities to bring mail directly to people's homes. Uniforms were not required until 1868, when the sharply dressed carriers became easy to identify. Carriers had to buy their own uniforms, which consisted of matching blue-gray sack coats and pants.

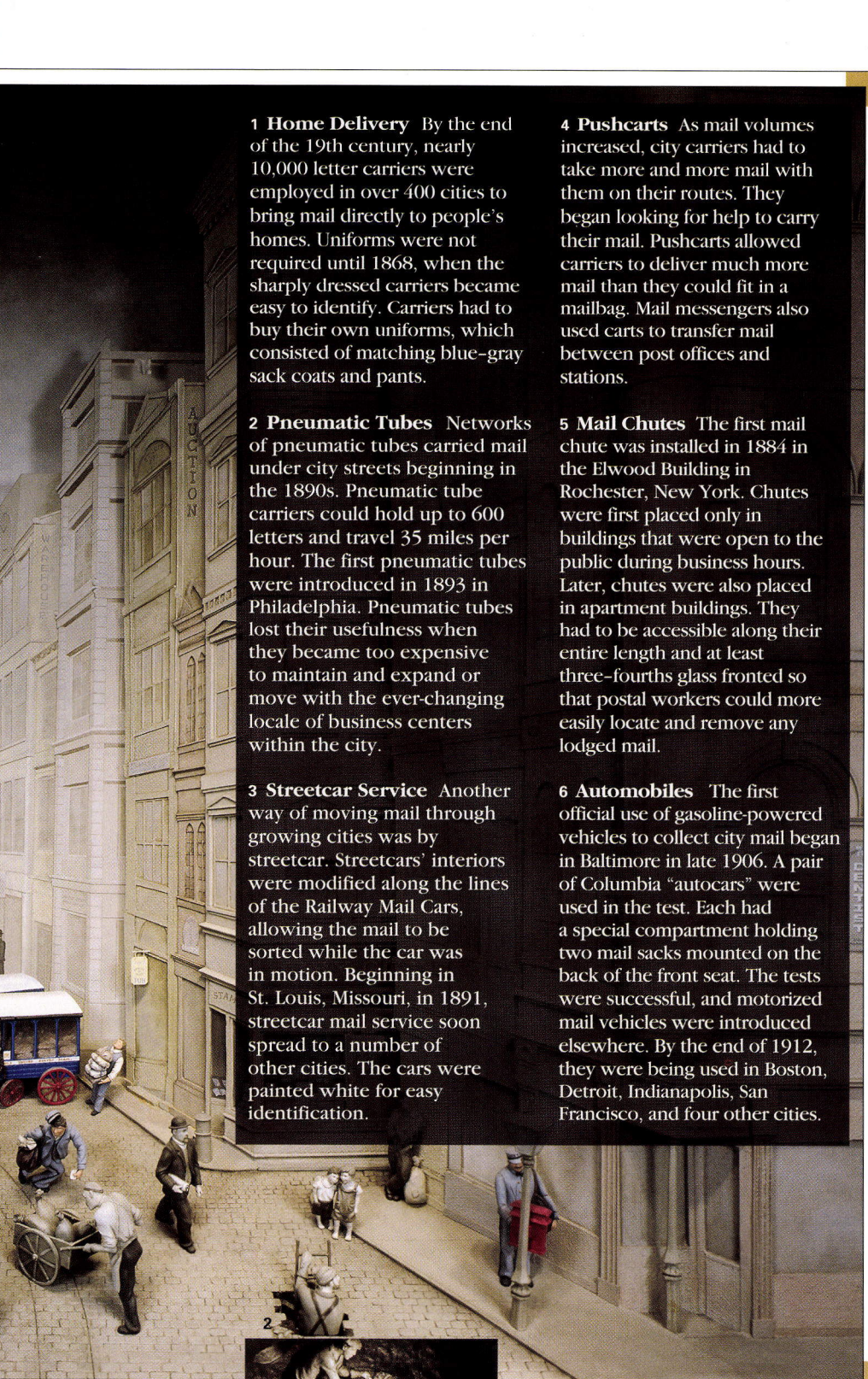
2 Pneumatic Tubes Networks of pneumatic tubes carried mail under city streets beginning in the 1890s. Pneumatic tube carriers could hold up to 600 letters and travel 35 miles per hour. The first pneumatic tubes were introduced in 1893 in Philadelphia. Pneumatic tubes lost their usefulness when they became too expensive to maintain and expand or move with the ever-changing locale of business centers within the city.

3 Streetcar Service Another way of moving mail through growing cities was by streetcar. Streetcars' interiors were modified along the lines of the Railway Mail Cars, allowing the mail to be sorted while the car was in motion. Beginning in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1891, streetcar mail service soon spread to a number of other cities. The cars were painted white for easy identification.

4 Pushcarts As mail volumes increased, city carriers had to take more and more mail with them on their routes. They began looking for help to carry their mail. Pushcarts allowed carriers to deliver much more mail than they could fit in a mailbag. Mail messengers also used carts to transfer mail between post offices and stations.

5 Mail Chutes The first mail chute was installed in 1884 in the Elwood Building in Rochester, New York. Chutes were first placed only in buildings that were open to the public during business hours. Later, chutes were also placed in apartment buildings. They had to be accessible along their entire length and at least three-fourths glass fronted so that postal workers could more easily locate and remove any lodged mail.

6 Automobiles The first official use of gasoline-powered vehicles to collect city mail began in Baltimore in late 1906. A pair of Columbia "autocars" were used in the test. Each had a special compartment holding two mail sacks mounted on the back of the front seat. The tests were successful, and motorized mail vehicles were introduced elsewhere. By the end of 1912, they were being used in Boston, Detroit, Indianapolis, San Francisco, and four other cities.



Mailboxes

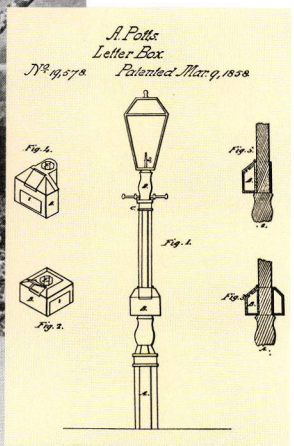
By the mid–1800s the Post Office Department began to build and distribute mailboxes throughout U.S. cities. Today's familiar street-corner mailbox evolved from years of tinkering and testing. Each new mailbox represents a reworking or rethinking of the designs that preceded it.

1 This mailbox, manufactured by the Reading, Pennsylvania, firm of Orr and Painter, could be hung anywhere. It was large and strong, but to Americans of the ornamental Victorian era of the 1880s, these unattractive boxes ruined both the elegant lamp posts and buildings to which they were attached.

2 Willard D. Doremus designed this mailbox in 1889. The boxes were not very strong and were easily shattered by thieves who made off with the mail. The lip over the letter slot often broke, letting in rain and snow.

3 This stronger mailbox was designed in 1901 by Eugene D. Scheble, a dentist from Toledo, Ohio. It is made of sheet metal, not iron. Although well designed, the purchase contract was illegally obtained. Several postal employees and contractors were indicted by a grand jury on charges of conspiracy and fraud in connection with the contracts.

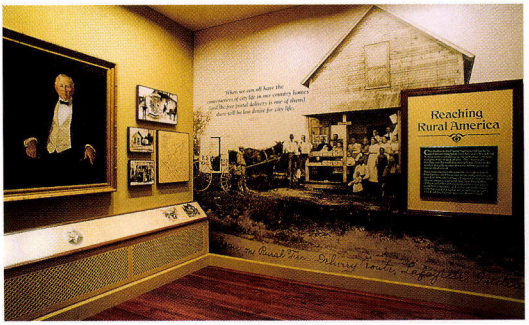
▼ The first mailbox approved by the Post Office Department was fastened to curbside lamp posts. It was produced at a Philadelphia foundry run by Albert Potts. The box proved too small, for carriers had to empty it many times during the day.



4 The strong and sturdy sheet-metal mailboxes produced in 1905 by the Van Dorn Iron Works of Cleveland, Ohio, protected the mail against theft and weather. But when these bright red mailboxes were set up, people confused them with fire alarm boxes. The Post Office Department responded by painting them green, but many people found the block–like design ugly.

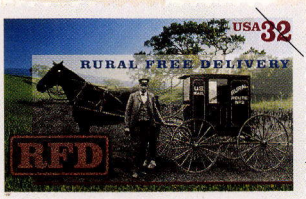
5 David Owen, postmaster of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, adapted an earlier idea of using a drop–bottom mailbox. Carriers unlocked the bottom and let the letters pour into their pouch. These mailboxes may look familiar to some readers. A few are still in use today in some areas of the country.

Reaching Rural America



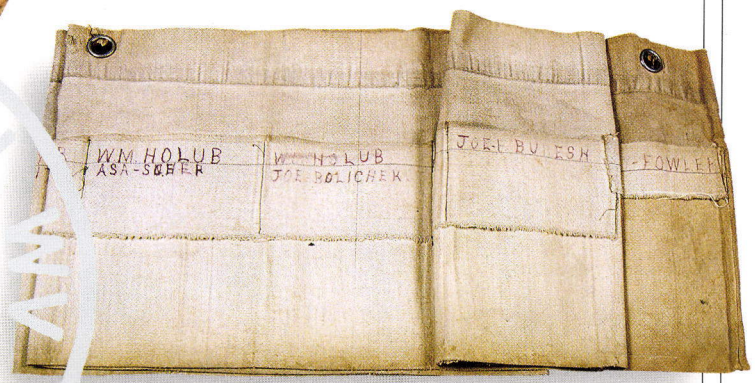
Long after city dwellers began to enjoy free home mail delivery, rural Americans still had to travel to the post office—which was often in a country store—to pick up their mail. Many journeyed considerable distances over tough and muddy dirt roads to get their mail, with no assurance that any letters would be there. Farm families, who paid the same postage rates as the rest of the nation, began to complain. For decades Congress was reluctant to act, fearing that the country was so large that a rural free delivery service would be a financial disaster. Experimental rural delivery finally began in 1896. Eight years later, the extremely popular service became an official part of the Post Office Department.

▲ One of the first sights greeting visitors to *Reaching Rural America* is a small-town post office from Dillsburg, Pennsylvania, where it was in use from 1917–1971. The local post office is a fixture of small-town America. Many post offices also serve as unofficial community centers, home to notice boards, neighborly chats and gossip. Local post offices continue to serve isolated citizens as outposts of the federal government.



◀ Delivery wagons and sleds were used by rural carriers across the country. Horse drawn sleds such as this were used in the northern states during winter months as mobile post offices. Carriers could cancel mail, sell stamps or postal stationery, issue money orders, and accept and deliver packages.

▼ One rural carrier created a practical sorting bag for his mail. Each pouch was labeled with the name of a family on his route, and he unrolled the bag pouch by pouch as he traveled his route.



LESTON
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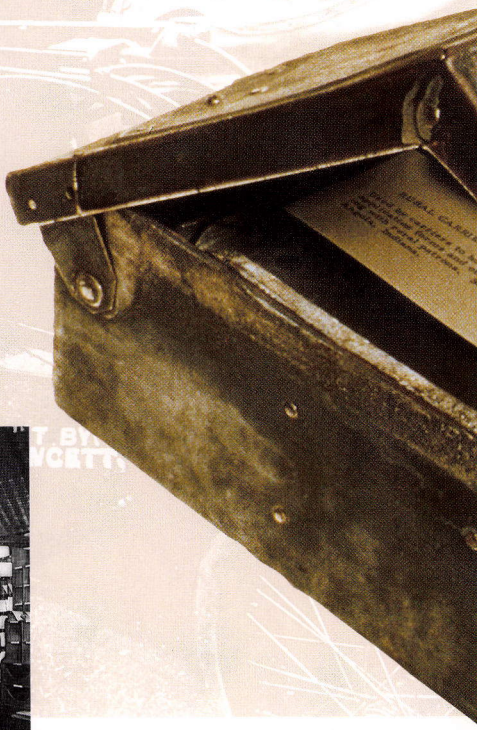
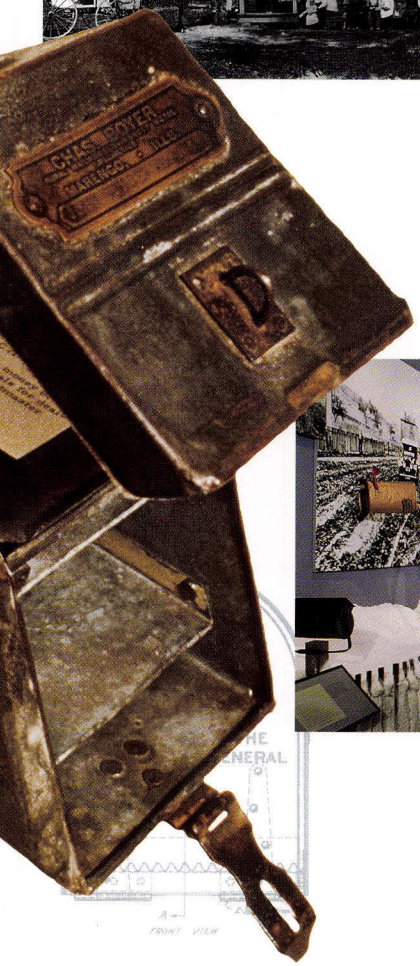
Rural Free Delivery Service called attention to the pitiful state of the nation's roads at the beginning of the 20th century. The Post Office Department insisted that roads be maintained in good condition before agreeing to provide the service. If a road fell into disrepair, the local postmaster could halt service until repairs were made. With better roads, schools, churches, and social events became easier to attend, and farmers could get their goods to town in bad weather.

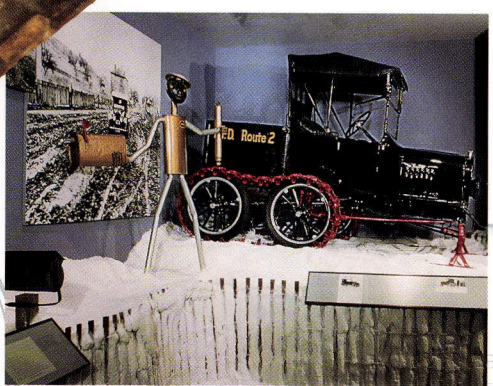


▲ Rural carriers still provide the services of mobile post offices. Along with delivering and retrieving mail, they can issue money orders and sell stamps and postal stationery. This cash box was used by a rural carrier to tote stamps, postal stationery, money orders and other postal materials along his route.

A special bond exists between rural carriers and the families along their route. Many grateful patrons meet their carriers with glasses of cool water in the summer and hot coffee in the winter. During World War II, rural carriers were called upon for more somber service. After their normal tours of duty, many delivered telegrams from Western Union to the families of servicemen killed in action.

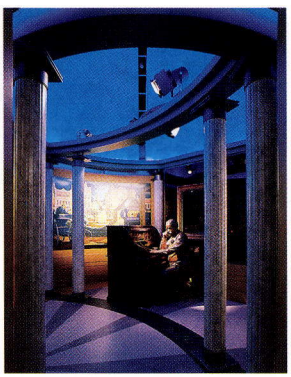


Depending on the terrain and climate, rural carriers used a variety of vehicles. During harsh winter months, many rural carriers switched the body of their RFD wagons onto runners. Similar changes could also be made to automobiles. This 1921 Ford Model–T was used by Harold Crabtree, a rural carrier from Central Square, New York. The front wheels were interchangeable with skis, and the rear tires were fitted with tank–like treads. Over 300,000 of these snowbird attachments were produced for use on rural delivery vehicles.



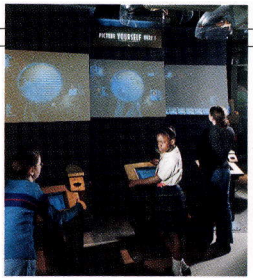
What's in the Mail For You!

By the 1950s, the massive growth in mail volume in America's cities directly reflected the growth of businesses. During the suburban boom of postwar America, the bonds between business and mail grew even stronger. By the 1970s parcel post and the mail-order industry were pushed to unprecedented heights by the mass movement of women into the workplace, the creation and distribution of credit cards, and toll-free 800 telephone numbers.

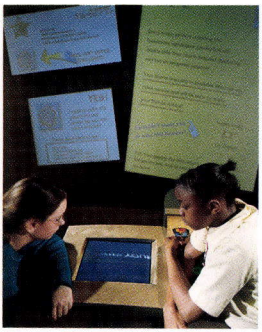


What's in the Mail for You!, the museum's most interactive gallery, is home to a series of films, displays, and computer stations that guide visitors through the contemporary mail–order process. Mail–order blossomed in the last decades of the 19th century under the dominance of two giant rivals, Sears Roebuck and Company and Montgomery Ward. Today thousands of mail–order companies market products around the world. ▼

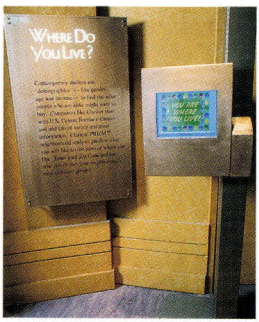
◀ Visitors learn how direct mail marketers target individuals by answering a few questions about themselves. Are they male or female? What part of the country are they from? What are their interests? With a card that holds their coded answers, visitors access other interactive portions of the gallery.



▲ Using the information from the card, a second station places visitors' photographs among thousands of others. A computer removes the photographs of people whose interests and vital statistics do not match those of the visitor, showing how direct mailers use demographic information to weed out people who probably would not be interested in their product.



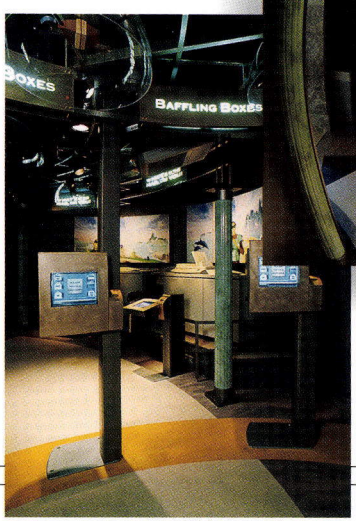
◀ Other computer stations let visitors try their hand at creating a mail piece . . .



◀ . . . see what direct marketing research says about their neighborhoods . . .

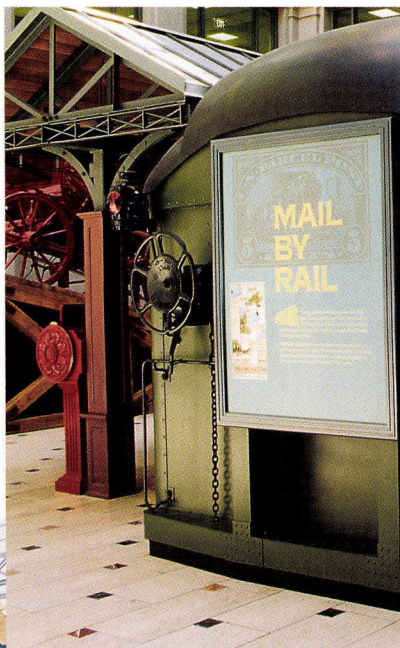
. . . and even receive a free mail piece. ▼

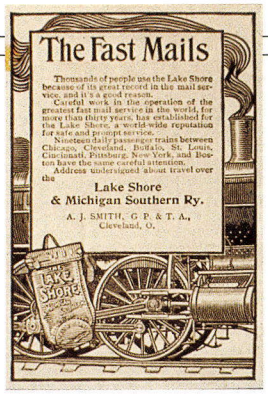
. . . test their mail–order knowledge. . . ▼

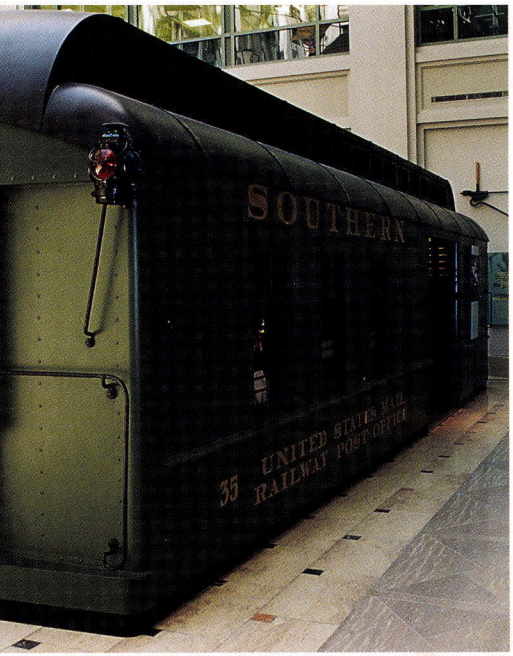


Transportation is critical to good mail service. Among the National Postal Museum's artifacts are a number of different vehicles that have carried the mail.

Moving the Mail



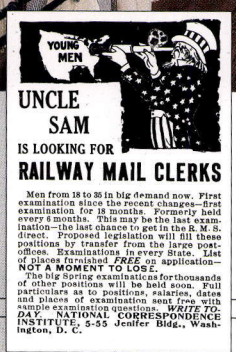

The Fast Mails
Thousands of people use the Lake Shore because of its great record in the mail service, and it's a good reason.
Careful work in the operation of the greatest fast mail service in the world, for more than thirty years, has established for the Lake Shore a world-wide reputation for safe and prompt service.
Nineteen daily passenger trains between Chicago, Cleveland, Buffalo, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Pittsburg, New York, and Boston have the same careful attention.
Address undersigned about travel over the
Lake Shore
& Michigan Southern Ry.
A. J. SMITH, G. P. & T. A.,
Cleveland, O.



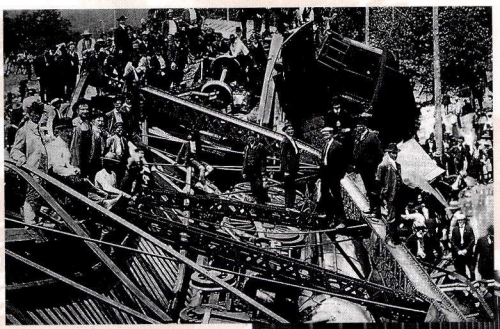
▲ After the Civil War, the Postal Service decentralized its operations and concentrated on the growing volume of mail being carried on the nation's rail lines. The Railway Mail Service revolutionized the way mail was processed by sorting mail aboard moving trains.

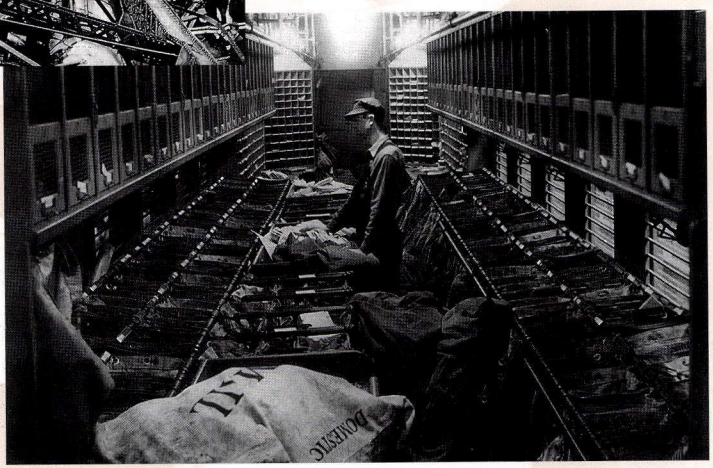
▲ In the 1920s and 1930s, funds from airmail contracts breathed life into the nation's fledgling commercial aviation industry. By the late 1940s, declining rail service and advances in mail processing techniques helped spur a return to centralized mail operations. Today mammoth Mail Sorting Centers are filled with hundreds of workers using dozens of computer–operated cancelers, processors, and sorters. These centers handle more mail in a single day than Railroad Post Office cars carried in an entire month.

▲ Sorting mail on moving trains was one of the greatest innovations introduced by the Postal Service. Mail previously untouched in bags on train floors was now processed as the train sped toward its destination. This new method of sorting the mail was developed just when railroads began to crisscross the nation regularly. The service grew as railroads came to dominate America from the end of the 19th century through World War II. The exterior replica of a Railway Post Office train was created by Smithsonian artisans. The original interior portion of the train came from a Railway Post Office train in Cleveland, Ohio.


YOUNG MEN
UNCLE SAM
IS LOOKING FOR
RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS
Men from 18 to 35 in big demand now. First examination since the recent changes—first examination for 18 months. Formerly held every 6 months. This may be the last examination—the last chance to get in the R. M. S. direct. Proposed legislation will fill these positions by transfer from the large post-offices. Examinations in every State. List of places furnished FREE on application—NOT A MOMENT TO LOSE.
The big Spring examinations for thousands of other positions will be held soon. Full particulars as to positions, salaries, dates and places of examination sent free with sample examination questions. WRITE TODAY. NATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTE, 5-55 Jenifer Bldg., Washington, D. C.

▼ Railway postal clerks were considered by many to be the most highly trained postal employees. They also worked under the greatest pressure. In addition to the regular demands of their jobs, they could, without warning, find themselves the victims of train wrecks and robberies.





MAIL ROBBERY!

900,00 DOLLARS

REWARD!

The Eastern and Western bound Mails were both robbed on Saturday evening the 29th ult., at a point 9 miles west of Centerville, Appanoose county, Iowa.

Four of the robbers took passage at Corydon, on the Stage coming East, two others at Fromise City. When after coming three miles they robbed the mail and waited until the arrival of the Stage going West, when they robbed the mail and passengers, and took six horses from the Coaches.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MEN.

DESCRIPTION OF THE HORSES.

$100 for each Man

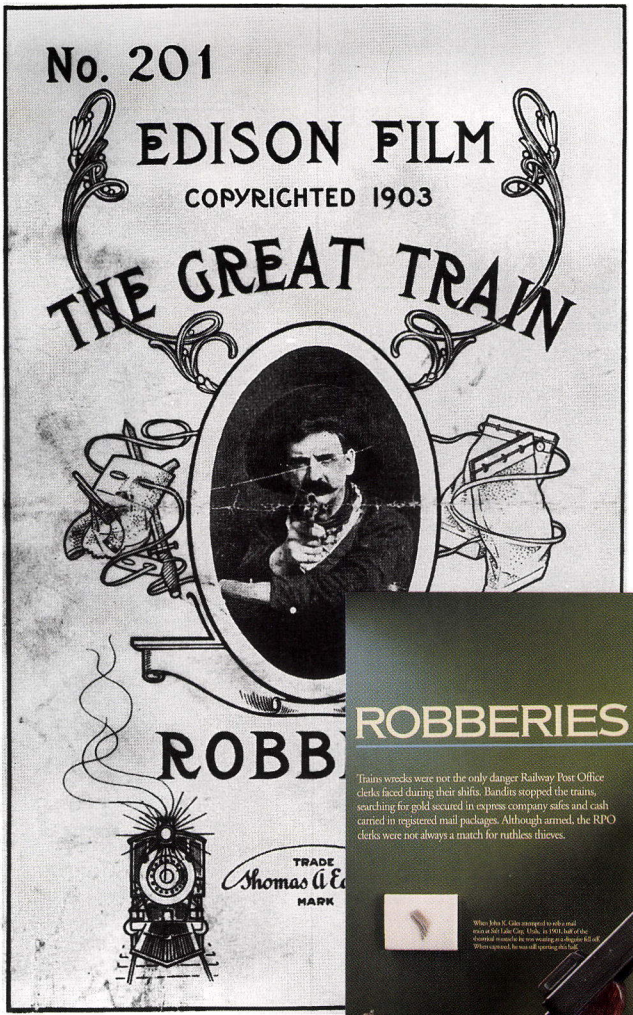
and $50 for each of the Horses is offered as a reward by the Western Stage Co., for their delivery at Centerville.

W. F. OGDEN, Agent Western Stage Co.

May 3d, 1865.

Post Masters please post up.

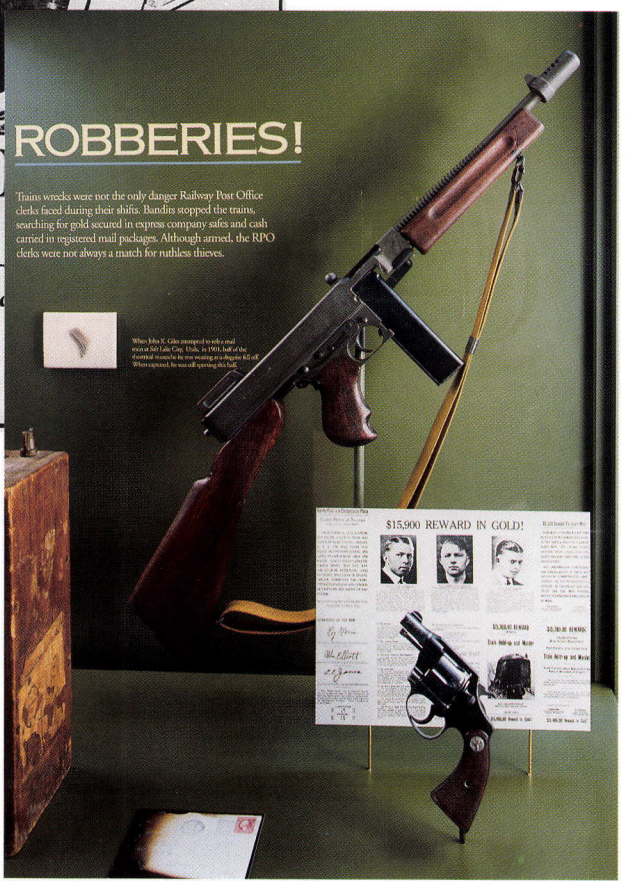
Some train robberies were particularly violent. Three brothers, Hugh, Ray, and Roy DeAutremont, used this detonator to blow up a mail train on October 11, 1923. They ambushed the train near the Siskiyou Mountains in southern Oregon. The blast destroyed the mail car, killing four clerks. The DeAutremonts got away with nothing, for the explosion destroyed the loot they sought.

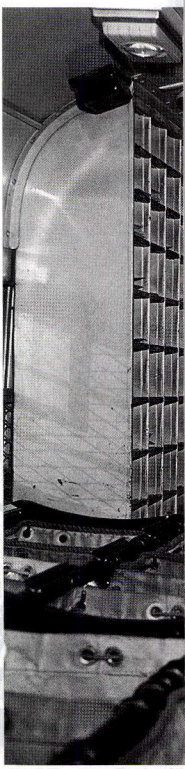


▼ John K. Guiles, who robbed the mail train at Salt Lake City, Utah, was foiled when half of the theatrical mustache he was wearing as a disguise fell off. Police matched it to the half he was still wearing when apprehended.

▼ Railway Post Office clerks were required to carry small .38–caliber pistols. The guns were considered little more than "bean shooters" by many RPO clerks. But they came in handy on occasion. When the Salt Lake City mail train was stopped en-route, the clerks on duty fired a hail of bullets and drove off the prospective thieves.

A wave of robberies in the early 1920s led the Postal Service to accept the services of U.S. marines to guard mail shipments; and, to arm postal inspectors with shotguns and Thompson submachine guns.

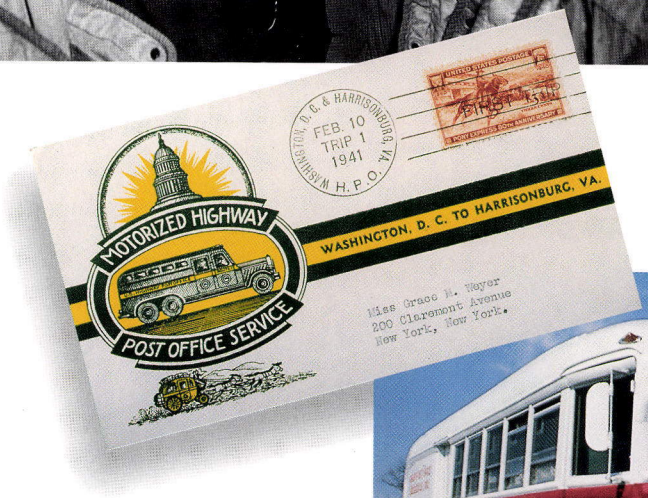

ROBBERIES!
Trains wrecks were not the only danger Railway Post Office clerks faced during their shifts. Bandits stopped the trains, searching for gold secured in express company safes and cash carried in registered mail packages. Although armed, the RPO clerks were not always a match for ruthless thieves.
$15,900 REWARD IN GOLD!



▲ Railway Post Office trains used a system of mail cranes like this one to exchange mail at stations on their routes without stopping. As a train approached the crane, a clerk prepared the catcher arm. It would snatch the incoming mailbag in the wink of an eye. The clerk then booted out the outgoing mailbag. If he did not kick it out hard enough it could be drawn under the train's wheels and burst open, sending letters flying everywhere. Clerks who did not know their routes well enough might prepare the catcher arm too early or too late. Experienced clerks, however, spoke with pride of making the switch at night with nothing but the curves and feel of the track to warn them of an upcoming catch.

By the 1930s, a significant decline in railroad passenger traffic caused a subsequent decline in the use of railway trains. To fill the void, the postal service transferred enroute distribution from trains to highway buses. The first Highway Post Office bus was built for $30,000 by the White Motor Company of Cleveland, Ohio. The bus made its first trip on February 10, 1941, serving routes between Washington, D.C., and Harrisonburg, VA.

From 1960 to 1963, buses replaced an average of twenty mail trains each month. The brightly colored red, white, and blue buses became a common sight on American highways. By the 1970s, changes in the organization of the Postal Service called for less reliance on sorting mail enroute. The last Highway Post Office run was made on June 30, 1974. ▼



Star Route Service

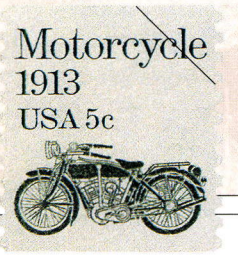
For over 150 years, the Post Office Department has contracted individuals to carry the mail from post office to post office. At first designated as "certainty, celerity, and security" routes, they became known as star routes when postal clerks began to substitute asterisks for the names. Star Route contractors are free to use whatever vehicle best suits their needs on the route. As a result, mail has been lugged by just about anything that would carry it. These carriers have not had it easy. They have been subject to attack, merciless weather, equipment failures, cantankerous animals, and tortuous terrain.

Motorizing the Mail

As cars and trucks replaced stagecoaches and wagons, the volume of mail kept climbing. The introduction of Parcel Post Service in 1913 brought millions of packages into the mail stream for the first time. In 1931, during the height of the service, the Post Office Department acquired 1,000 Ford Model AA mail trucks. The body, constructed principally of oak, was produced by the Metropolitan Body Corporation, while the chassis was produced by Ford. The Post Office Department was responsible for joining body and chassis together.

▲ After World War II, the amount of mail delivered to American homes each day increased so dramatically that letter carriers could no longer rely solely on pouches and handcarts to carry mail on their daily rounds. In the late 1950s, the Post Office Department began supplying carriers with three-wheeled mail vans. Called mailsters, these tiny vans were efficient in carrying mail but uncomfortable and dangerous. Mailsters offered little protection against cold or damp weather, little traction in good weather, often no traction in snow, and poor reliability, for they were constantly breaking down.

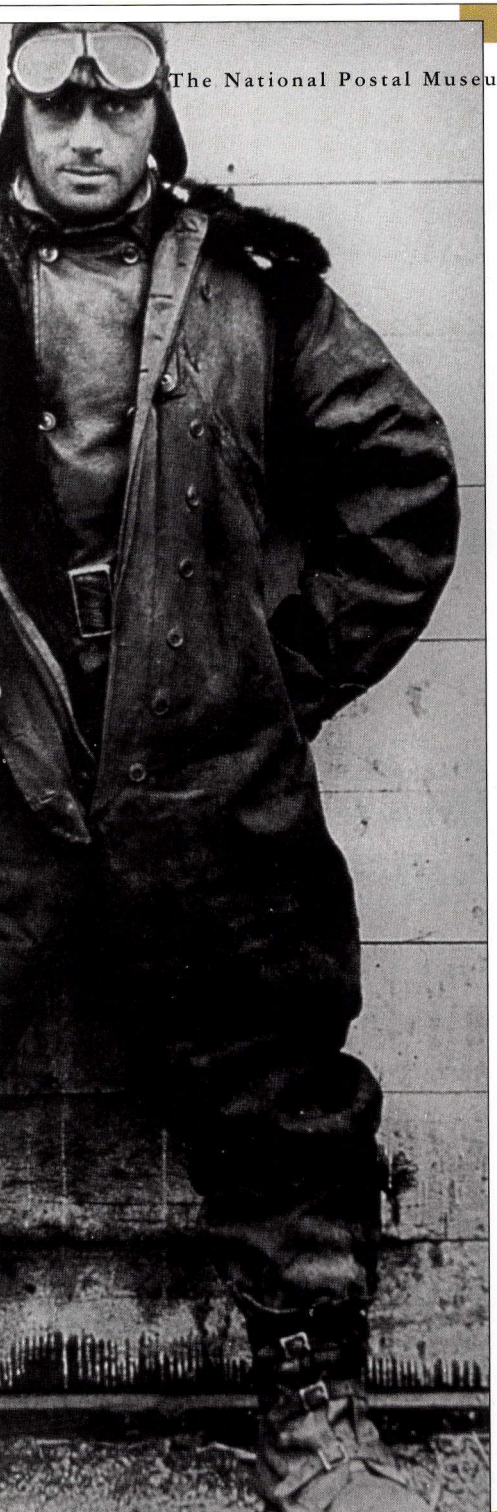
▲ Jeeps were a vital component of the postal service fleet after World War II. Postal officials, impressed by the performance of Jeeps during the war, decided to harness that strength for mail delivery. These strong, agile vehicles could stand up to the rigors of delivering the mail in any terrain or weather. The Postal Service purchased both left and right-hand drive jeeps for their carriers. Unlike previous postal vehicles, which were painted a drab shade of olive green, jeeps and other vehicles purchased in the 1950s were painted red, white, and blue.



Airmail

In 1911 this Wiseman–Cooke aircraft made the first mail flight officially sanctioned by a U.S. postmaster. The pilot carried letters from the mayor and postmaster of Petaluma, California, to their counterparts 18.5 miles away in Santa Rosa. Mechanical difficulties slowed the journey. The trip took two days to complete. The plane's top speed never exceeded 70 mph.

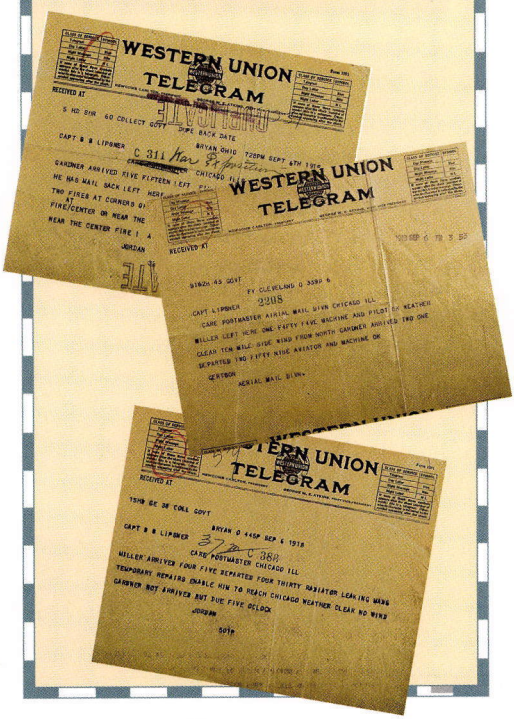
▼ This flight suit belonged to Eddie Gardner, a former automobile racer and one of America's first airmail pilots. Leather flight suits—including goggles, face mask, leggings, and helmet—were often the only protection the early pilots had in their open cockpits against the frigid weather. Eddie Gardner, who survived a number of accidents during his career as an airmail pilot, died in 1920 while stunt-flying at a Kansas county fair.

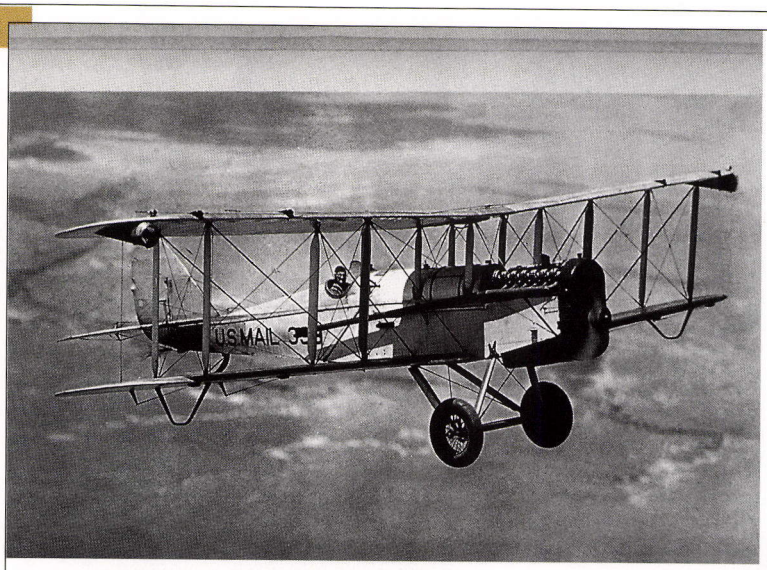


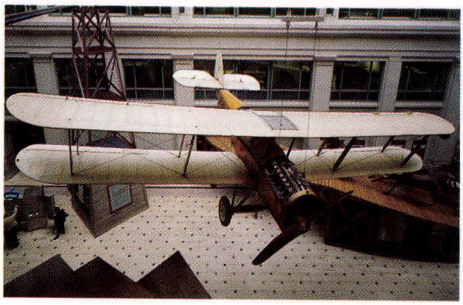
Eddie Gardner and fellow pilot Max Miller sent these telegrams to Benjamin Lipsner, superintendent of the young airmail service. The telegrams chart the pilots' progress as they raced from New York City to Chicago in 1918 in search of the best airmail route between the two cities.

Eddie Gardner

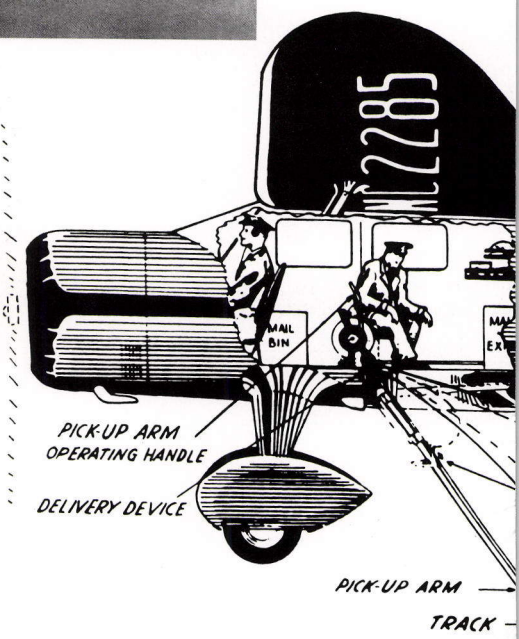
Max Miller

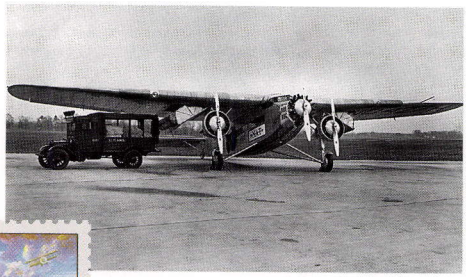




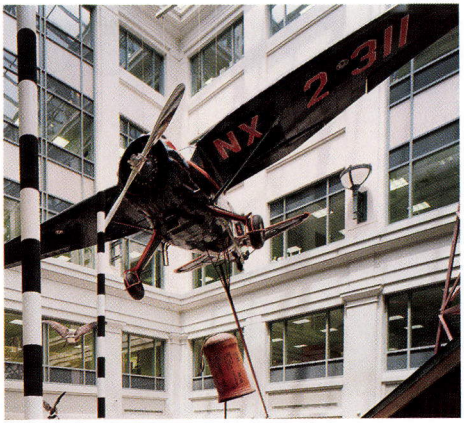


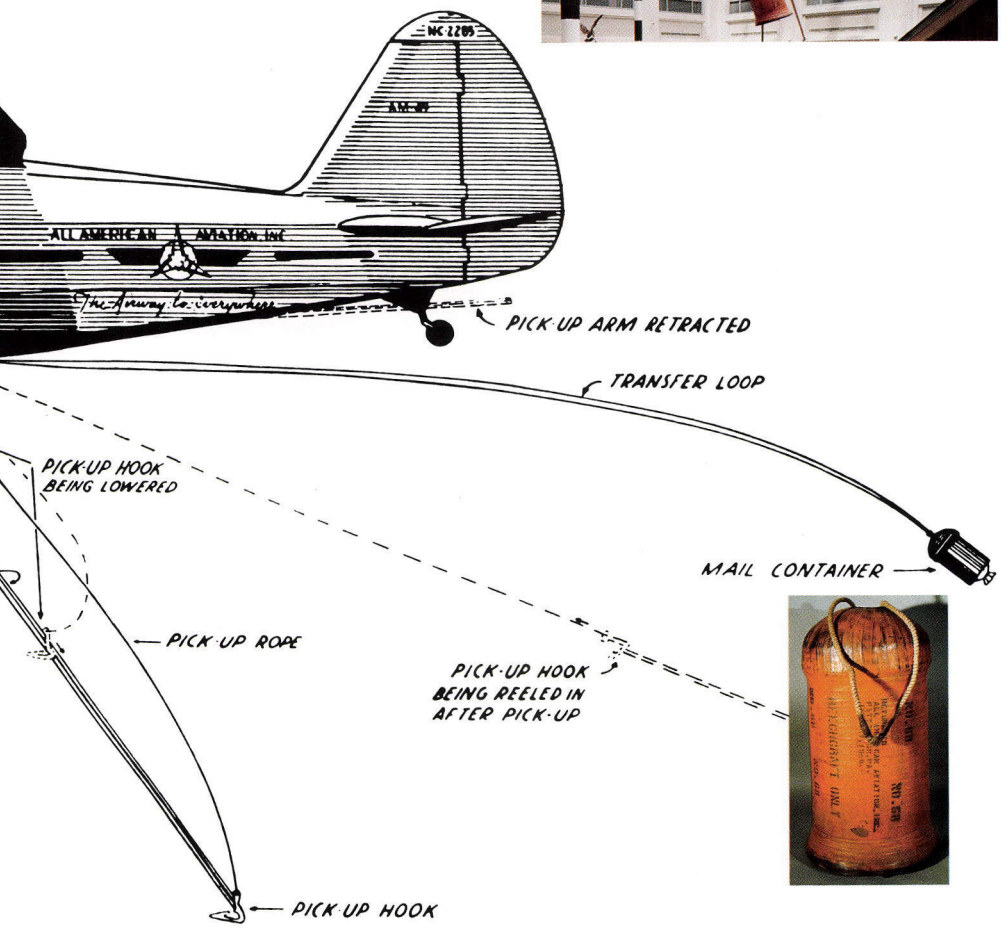
▲ Originally designed and outfitted for battle during World War I, the DeHavilland quickly became the workhorse of the U.S. Airmail Service. The first of these airplanes used by the Post Office Department were acquired from the Army Signal Corps. Design modifications converted the bomber and reconnaissance airplanes for low-flying, long-distance airmail use. The original cockpit became a mail compartment capable of holding 500 pounds of mail.





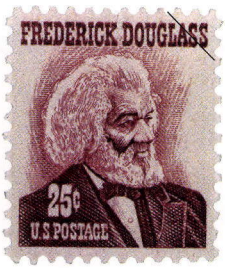
▶ Stinson Reliant monoplanes were used in 1939 to test a unique airmail service for communities that did not have landing fields. Mail was loaded into a container that was then placed on top of a contraption resembling a goal post. As the pilot guided the airplane down, the flight officer lowered a grappling hook to snag the container. Mail destined for the community was then dropped from the plane onto the airfield. The technique was modeled on the Railway Mail Service's "mail–on–the–fly" pickups.



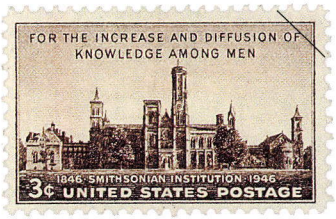


Stamps & Stories

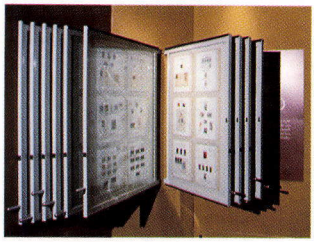
A stamp is much more than the physical evidence that postage has been paid. Stamps can be miniature works of art, treasured keepsakes, and rare collectibles.



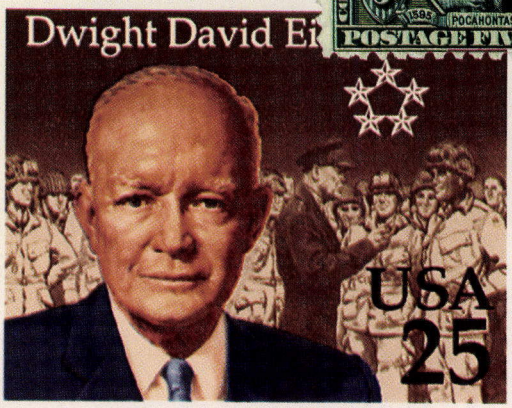
Written communications were costly and time-consuming until Great Britain adopted a number of historic postal reforms, including the world's first adhesive postage stamps, issued in 1840. The new "Penny Post" gave all citizens equal access to the postal system.

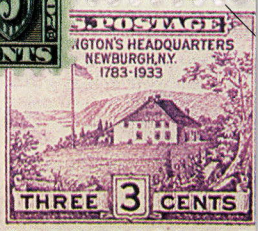


In 1847 the United States issued its first postage stamps—a five-cent stamp bearing Benjamin Franklin's image and a 10-cent stamp picturing George Washington. In the 150 years since, an extraordinary array of people and topics have adorned U.S. stamps, from icons of popular culture to the founding of Jamestown.



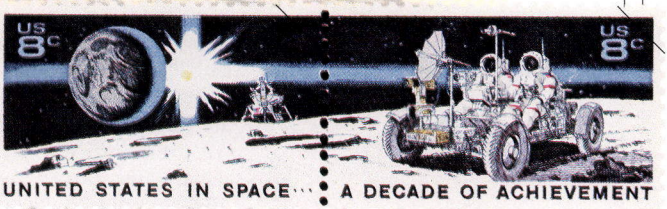
▲ *Stamps and Stories* is home to the most frequently rotated exhibits in the museum. With over 16 million philatelic objects in the museum's collection, the gallery can continue to host new and exciting philatelic exhibits for many years to come.





AFRICAN ELE

◀ Located within the *Stamps and Stories* gallery, the *Rarities Vault* has been home to a number of highly prized philatelic displays. Notable exhibits have included a display of 24 of the 100 original 24–cent 1918 inverted airmail stamp, rarities from colonial America and Nashville, Tennessee, as well as a salute to the anniversary of the first American postage stamps.



Which Way is Up?

A printing mistake occasionally turns a common stamp into a highly prized trophy. The well-known 24-cent airmail stamp of 1918 is a famous example. An unused regular copy of the stamp is worth something less than $100 in today's market. A stamp of the same issue with an inverted center can be sold for one thousand times that price. Only one sheet of one hundred of these stamps, affectionately known as the Inverted Jenny, was sold. The lucky buyer was William T. Robey of Washington, D.C.

▲ Inverted stamp errors are created when a sheet of stamps passes through more than one printing, usually to add another color. When the sheets are set up for the second pass, if one sheet has been turned around while being moved, the frame or vignette will print upside down. In the case of the Inverted Jenny, the frame was printed first. The sheet was inadvertently turned around, and when the center, or vignette, was printed, the plane appeared to be flying upside down. For the other inverted stamps shown on these pages, it was the vignette that was printed first, and the frame second.

▲ In 1869 a series of stamps was printed depicting American symbols and history. Three denominations of inverted stamps were mistakenly created during the production of this series. Inverts appeared in the 15–cent, 24–cent, and 30–cent issues.

Only about ninety used and three unused copies are recorded as still existing from the 15–cent issue. The central design illustrates the "Landing of Columbus," originally engraved by John Balch.

Approximately seventy-seven used and four unused copies have been recorded from the 24–cent issue. The vignette shows "The Declaration of Independence, 4 July 1776 at Philadelphia," originally painted by John Trumbull.

Only about thirty-six used and seven unused copies are recorded from the 30–cent issue. The central design of this stamp illustrates the American Eagle, Shield, and Flags, from a wash drawing by James Macdonough.

On May 1, 1901, a series of stamps went on sale that celebrated the Pan–American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. Just as in 1869, printing errors caused inverted stamps to appear in three issues of the series.

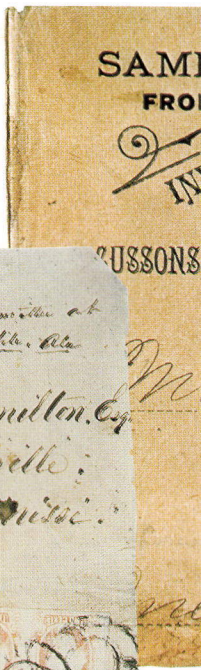
Approximately one thousand errors were printed of the one–cent issue. Most of the stamps in the set depict contemporary modes of transportation. This denomination shows the Great Lakes steamer City of Alpena.

Only about 155 unused and three used copies are known to exist of the two–cent error from 1901. The illustration is believed to be locomotive #938 of the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad.

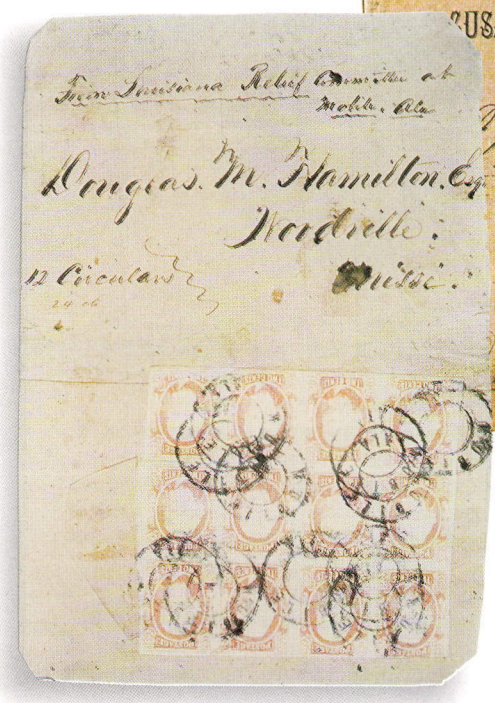
The Post Office Department deliberately printed one sheet of 400 inverts from the four–cent issue. Of those, 286 were distributed to dignitaries. The illustration is of one of the first electric automobiles. It is an enclosed coach or brougham used by the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad as a bus in Washington, D.C. ▼

Philatelic Rarities

◀ On July 1, 1847, the United States issued its first official postage stamps—a five–cent stamp with Benjamin Franklin's image and a ten-cent stamp picturing George Washington. They were produced by the printing firm of Rawdon, Wright, Hatch & Edson.



▶ One of the Confederate States of America's early stamp printers was the firm of Archer and Daly of Richmond, Virginia. Among the stamps they produced was a two–cent denomination portraying Andrew Jackson. It was released in April 1863 to prepay postage on drop letters (for delivery within the city of mailing) and for printed circulars. This cover represents the largest known block of this two–cent Confederate stamp on cover. The twelve circulars enclosed required twelve stamps.



▲ These stamps are known as "Postmaster Provisionals." Before the U.S. Government had printed its first stamp, Postmaster William B. Sayles placed these stamps on sale at Providence, Rhode Island, on August 24, 1846. Five hundred sheets of stamps were printed. Over 300 were sold across the post office counter before the new general issue of the United States superseded them in July 1847, less than one year after issue.

▼ To prevent reuse, postal workers have always been admonished to cancel or obliterate postage stamps on mail, even though the procedure at times resulted in inconvenience or a delay in mail processing. One of the first innovations in connection with postmarking was the application of a canceling mark before the stamp was sold or used. The example shown here is the rare Glen Allen, Virginia, "Star" on a cover mailed from that town on August 3, 1886. The Glen Allen "precancel," as it is best known, was in use from the 1870s to 1898. Stamps were affixed to envelopes and then precanceled on a printing press. The town of Glen Allen has since become incorporated into Richmond, Virginia.

Henry K. Jarrett produced a series of forged philatelic items in the 1930s as a money making scheme, selling the phony material to unsuspecting stamp collectors. Jarrett's plot fell apart when he offered a five–cent Annapolis "postmaster provisional" stamp to Alfred H. Caspary, a major philatelic collector. He offered to send the Annapolis cover to Caspary for examination. Caspary, however, already owned one of the two known surviving examples of that stamp and knew of the other. He notified postal inspectors, and Jarrett's "rarity" was declared a fake. Inspectors clinched the case when they conducted a search of Jarrett's rooms and found a variety of papers and inks and an assortment of postmaster provisional dies. ▼

▼ In 1959 Canada issued a commemorative stamp for the St. Lawrence Seaway. As a bicolor stamp, the issue went through the presses twice. A small quantity of inverts were accidentally printed and distributed to Canadian post offices. Approximately 62 mint and used examples remain in the hands of collectors.

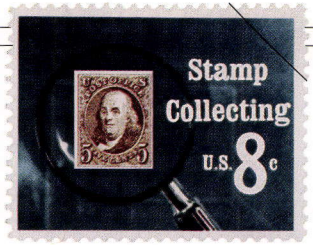
This issue of postage stamps, ranging in value from one cent to two dollars, was originally designed to be issued in bicolor. The centers were to be black, and the frames were to be various colors. At the outbreak of the Spanish–American War, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing was required to print enormous amounts of revenue stamps. The time and manpower required to print postage stamps in two colors could not be spared. The bicolored concept was abandoned, and the trans–Mississippi commemorative series of 1898 appeared in only one color. ▶

▲ The one–dollar Colonial Rush Lamp and Candle Holder stamp was first printed in 1979. In 1986 one hundred stamps with the inverted brown candle and flame were sold to the public. Five of the stamps sold to the general public were presumed to have been used on mail, with the invert error going undetected. The remaining 95 were purchased by employees of the CIA. This stamp error soon became known as the "CIA invert."

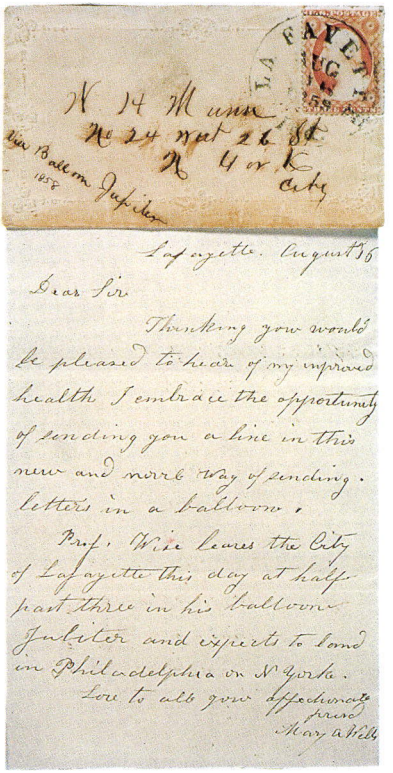
▶ Inverted stamps aren't the only valuable printing errors. Copies of this 1962 Canal Zone stamp were printed with the Thatcher Bridge missing. One sheet of 200 stamps without the silver bridge escaped detection and was shipped to the Canal Zone Postal Administration. One pane of fifty stamps was sold to an American stamp dealer before the error was found. Of the three other panes recovered from the stock on hand, two were donated to the National Postal Museum and the third was destroyed.

◀ This stamp is known as a "color error." It is the four-cent denomination from the 1893 Columbian issue. The error, shown on top, was printed in a distinctive deep blue instead of ultramarine. Fewer than 200 exist. Columbus' three vessels, the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria, are shown on the stamps.

◀ This 1872 proof is for a $5,000 revenue stamp that would indicate payment of taxes on highly valued objects. While the design was officially approved, the stamp was never issued.

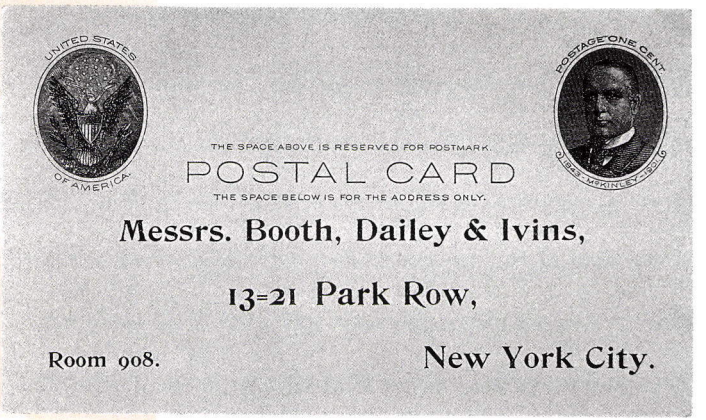


▶ This is the first piece of mail flown across the Atlantic. It was carried in 1919 on the NC–4, the U.S. Navy "Flying Boat" that successfully completed the first transatlantic flight. Before the flight, the plane and its crew were in Halifax, Canada. Machinist Pat Carroll wrote a letter to his brother Charles, a corporal with the American Expeditionary Forces in France. Pat asked a member of the NC–4 flight crew to carry the letter and mail it after the flight. The plane left Halifax on May 15, flying first to Trepassey, Newfoundland. The plane reached the Azores on May 20 and Lisbon, Portugal on May 27, where the letter was placed in the mail.

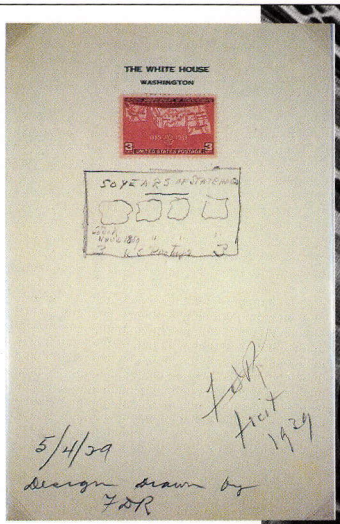

LAFAYETTE
AUG
Lafayette. August 16
Dear Sir
Thinking you would
be pleased to hear of my improved
health I embrace the opportunity
of sending you a line in this
new and novel way of sending
letters in a balloon.
Prof. Wise leaves the City
of Lafayette this day at half
past three in his balloon
Jubiter and expects to land
in Philadelphia or N York.
Love to all your affectionate
friend
Mary A Wells

This is the only known surviving piece of mail from an historic flight made on August 17, 1859. Professor John Wise carried it in his balloon, *Jupiter,* on a flight from Lafayette to Crawfordsville in Indiana. A previously successful flight gave the postmaster of Lafayette the idea of carrying the mail by air. Wise carried 123 letters and 23 circulars on his Indiana flight. Unfortunately, the air currents were unfavorable for a long flight. Unable to maintain sufficient altitude and heading the wrong way, Wise touched down near Crawfordsville after a flight of about 30 miles.

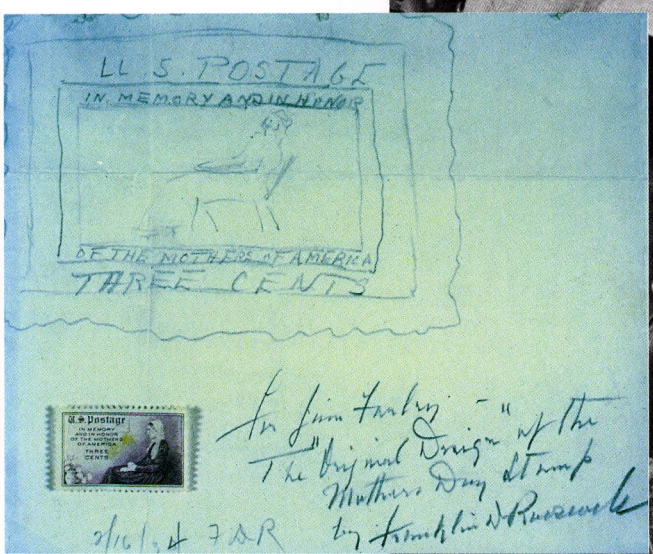
These postcards depicting President William McKinley were printed in 1902. They were considered to be such a poor likeness of the late president that they were ordered destroyed. One box of 500 escaped destruction and was sold to a New York City trash company by mistake.



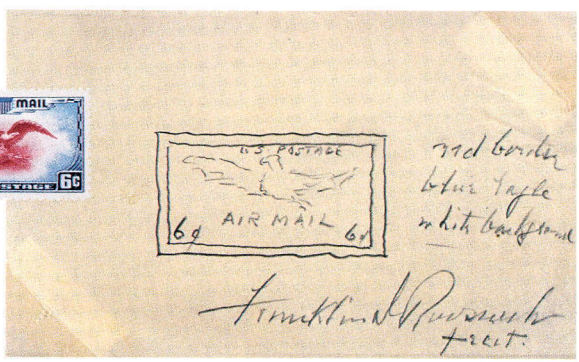
▶ In 1939 Roosevelt sketched this design on White House stationery for the "50 Years of Statehood" issue for Washington, South Dakota, North Dakota and Montana. An example of the issued stamp appears above the president's sketch.



▶ Roosevelt provided the original sketch for the "Mothers of America" stamp. In 1933 Mrs. H. H. McCluer, a past national president of the American War Mothers, conceived the idea of issuing a special stamp for use in conjunction with Mother's Day mail. She met with Roosevelt on January 25, 1934. Known to be a devoted son, the president granted her request three weeks later.



Franklin Delano Roosevelt, shown here depositing a letter into the first Highway Post Office bus on its 1941 inaugural run, was one of the most famous stamp collectors in the United States. As president, Roosevelt was in a unique position to indulge his love of stamps. One way he did that was to sketch his own design proposals for stamps. These photographs show his designs for three different stamps.

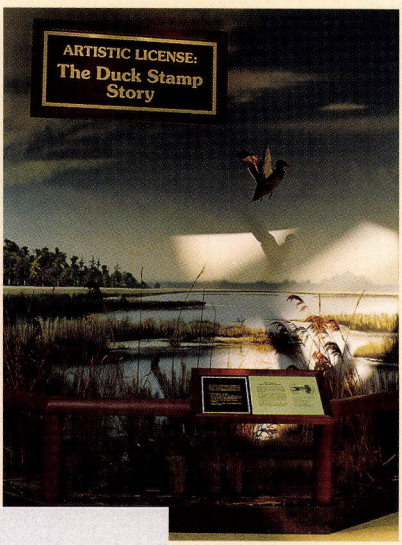


◀ This is Roosevelt's design for the 1938 six–cent airmail stamp. The stamp design was taken from a Library of Congress bookplate.

Artistic License

In 1934 the continental population of migratory waterfowl reached its lowest point in recorded history. The federal government, working to save the waterfowl through wetlands preservation, created the "Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp." This revenue stamp is commonly known as the Federal Duck Stamp. Hunters purchase the stamp for the right to hunt waterfowl, and the rest are sold to stamp collectors, conservationists, and art lovers.

One of the most successful federal conservation programs is based upon a stamp. Funds from the sale of duck stamps have helped to preserve wetland habitats since the mid–1930s. In the early 1700s, more than 220 million acres of wetlands dotted the landscape of the future United States. Ducks, geese, and swans thrived on these lands, clouding flyways. Wild populations and natural habitats seemed limitless. But as the nation grew, many of the wetlands in the continental United States were lost to agriculture, land development, market hunting and droughts. The loss of these essential breeding and wintering areas was devastating to America's waterfowl.



The Art of Cards and Letters

Messenger of sympathy and love

Servant of parted friends

Consoler of the lonely

Bond of the scattered family

Enlarger of the common life

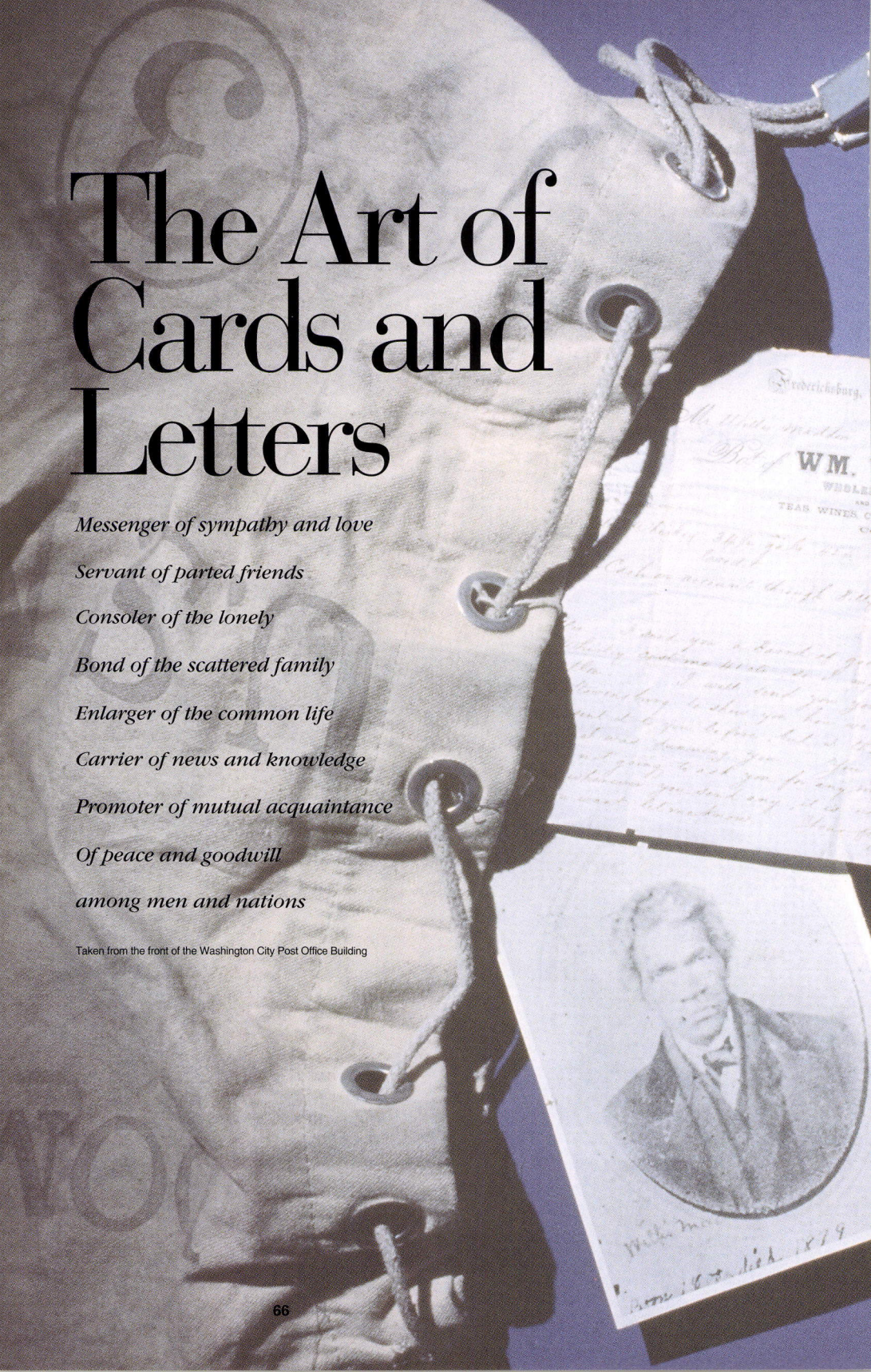
Carrier of news and knowledge

Promoter of mutual acquaintance

Of peace and goodwill

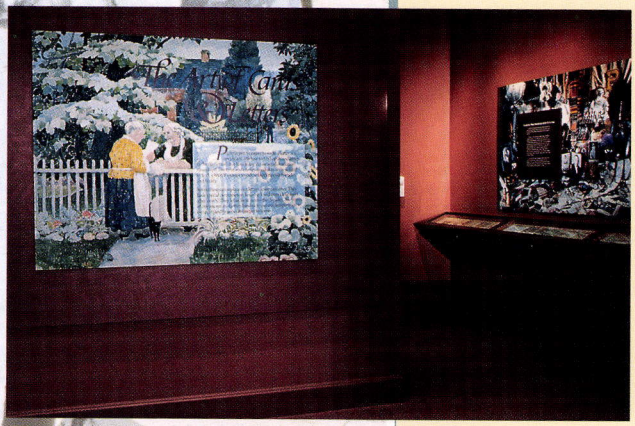
among men and nations

Taken from the front of the Washington City Post Office Building

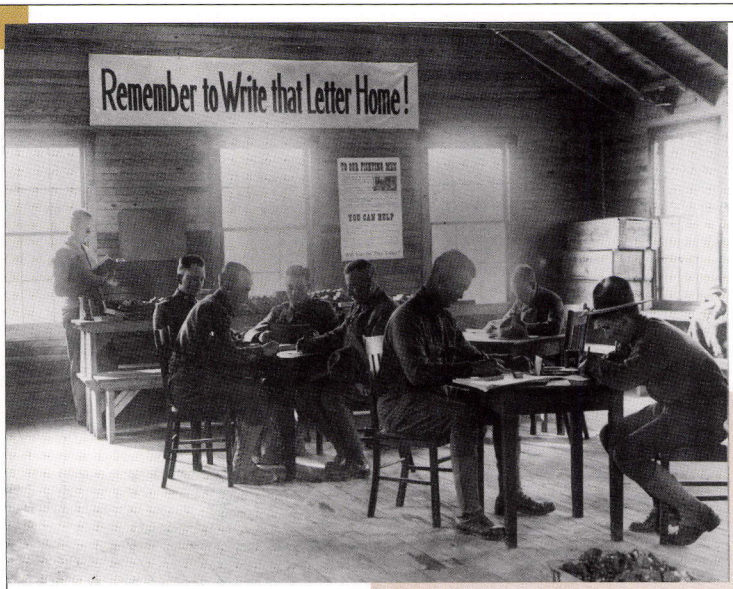


Binding Families Through Letters

Americans love to get cards and letters in the mail, but how many do we actually receive or send anymore? The time and effort needed to write letters seems hard to find when it's easier to contact friends and relatives by telephone or electronic mail. Yet letters still have a special place in our hearts. They have a remarkable permanence, keeping us close to loved ones even after death. Letters let us reach back across the decades to hear the voices of our ancestors. They bind us to our present and our past.

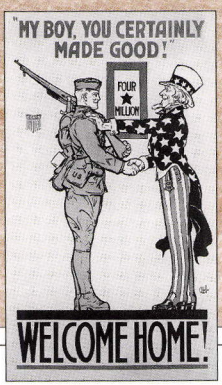


The Art of Cards and Letters has been home to a number of changing exhibits that focus on the history and extraordinary importance of written communication. Past exhibits have included letters and documents recording the two-hundred-year history of an African American family, the efforts of a family to escape the Holocaust by emigrating to America, letters from contemporary American immigrants, and a collection of White House Christmas cards. The gallery has also been used to display postcards and exquisite entries from the museum's annual envelope–calligraphy contest.



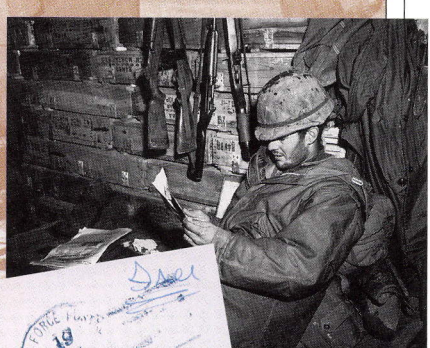
▲ This registration handstamp marking device was salvaged from the battleship *U.S.S. Oklahoma* following its sinking in Pearl Harbor. The device bears the date "Dec. 6, 1941," the day before the infamous Japanese attack that plunged the United States into World War II.

Mail remains a critical morale booster for military personnel. Letters written during wartime can be emotionally wrenching. The specter of death magnifies the separation between family and friends and has led many to pour heart and soul into wartime correspondence.



I WANT YOU
FOR U.S. ARMY
NEAREST RECRUITING STATION

UNITED STATES POSTAGE
3¢
IWO JIMA



Pvt John Milbury
U.S. Army
Soldier's Mail
James Milbury
97 Clermont Ave
Brooklyn
New York
U.S.A.
U.S.A.
Army

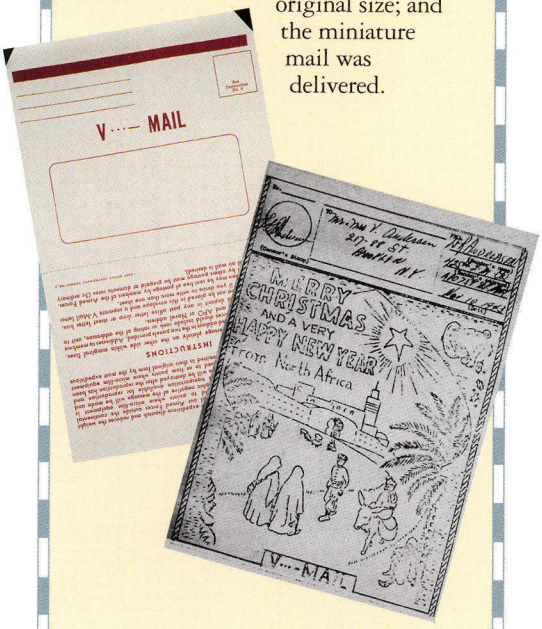
Bond of Family and Friends

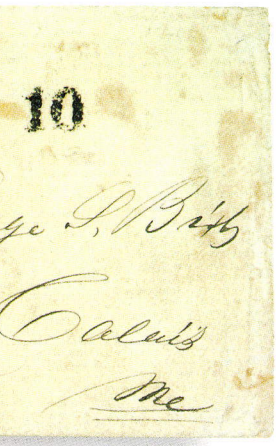
Mail, instrumental in connecting Americans for over two hundred years, is no longer alone. Today telephones, electronic mail, and fax machines also keep us in touch with friends and family. Yet, people still cherish written letters. The emotional capacity of mail also binds together the varied objects and exhibits found in the National Postal Museum.

▲ Probably no state's citizens came to appreciate regular mail service as much as those in Alaska, where long and harsh winters cut them off from each other and the rest of the world. This 13½–foot–long dogsled was handcrafted from hickory. Charlie Biederman used it until 1938 to carry mail under contract to the postal service over his 325–mile route between the Alaskan towns of Eagle and Circle. Biederman used six dogs to pull his mail sled. Dogsleds were common in Alaska, especially when boats were icebound in the winter cold that froze lakes and rivers. Mail had been carried by dog-sled between Eagle and Circle since the first post offices were established there in the late 1890s.

V–Mail consisted of miniaturized messages reproduced by microphotography from 16mm film. The system was adopted by the U.S. government with this country's entry into World War II in 1941. This unusual service helped solve a critical shortage of overseas shipping space for mail during the war. The system of microfilming letters used special V–Mail letter sheets, a combination of letter and envelope. The user wrote the message in the limited space provided, placed the name and address of the recipient in the designated place, folded the form, affixed postage (if necessary) and mailed it.

Postal workers forwarded these forms to microfilming centers where the correspondence was reduced to thumbnail size. The rolls of film were sent to prescribed destinations for developing at a receiving station near to the addressees. Finally, individual facsimiles of the letter sheets were reproduced about one–quarter the original size; and the miniature mail was delivered.

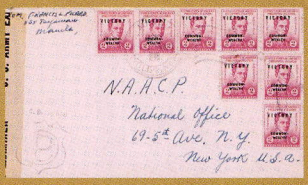


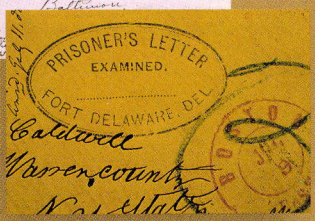


◀ Among the first U.S. examples of illustrated envelopes were those produced for miners who had rushed westward in response to the discovery of gold in California in 1848. About twenty-seven covers are known to exist with this mining scene design. They were designed by James M. Hutchings, an Englishman who arrived in the goldfields in 1849. Hutchings was not up to the strenuous physical demands of gold mining. To make a living, he began sketching and selling scenes of the camps, eventually producing illustrated stationery and envelopes. This cover dates from about 1855 and was sent from Jacksonville, California, to Calais, Maine.

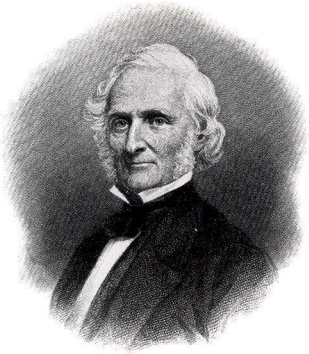
Mail and Democracy

Colonial Americans understood the importance of news and information to the success of self-government. They were quick to take up the business of distributing the news. Printers and newspapers appeared across the new nation, beginning what would become a long relationship between publications and the mail. The sanctity of American posts was prized by the nation's founders. Those whose mail had been opened and inspected by the British post were determined to protect the mails under the new government.

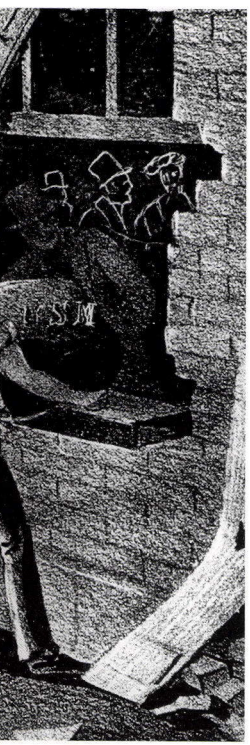




◀ Censorship, and the battles it provokes, have long fueled debate among Americans. Censors have been given great latitude during wartime, searching for anything that might aid the enemy. Like letters, newspapers and periodicals have also been subject to censorship. The First Amendment forbids Congress from passing laws abridging the freedom of the press. But did this limitation guarantee newspapers the right to circulation by mail, regardless of content?



▲ During the Civil War, fierce antislavery sentiment brought postal officials into the center of the debate over censorship and constitutional rights. As early as the 1830s, antislavery advocates were testing the limits of the First Amendment. Abolitionist newspapers and pamphlets were sent by U.S. mail to southern subscribers, church members, and legislators. Southern postmasters were placed in the midst of the conflict. If they refused to deliver antislavery publications, they were subject to federal penalties. On the other hand, if they delivered those publications, they faced state penalties and even mob attacks.

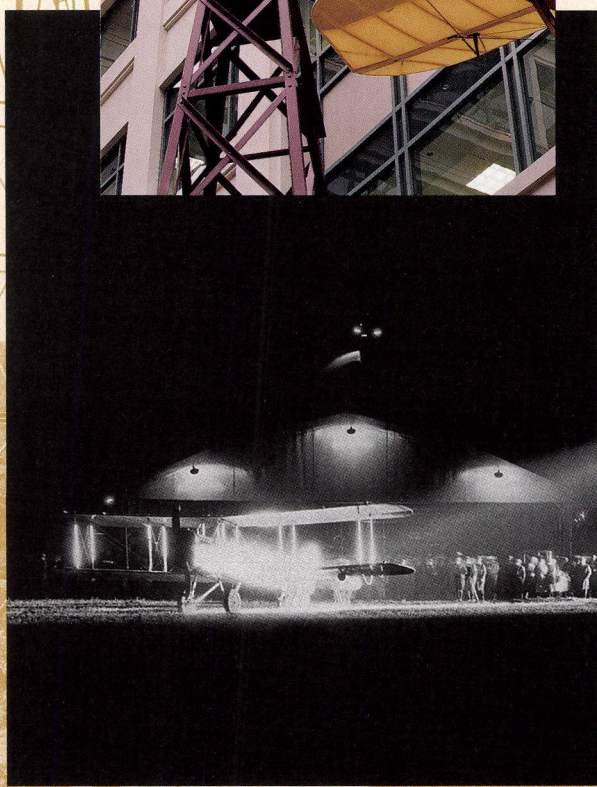


In 1835 Alfred Huger, the beleaguered postmaster of Charleston, South Carolina, asked Postmaster General Amos Kendall for permission to refuse antislavery material at his post office. While responding that as postmaster general he had "no legal authority to exclude newspapers from the mail," Kendall acknowledged Huger's dilemma and agreed to overlook whatever action Huger might take.

▲▼ Americans cherish the freedom to speak their minds in their correspondence. Occasionally those views even spill out onto the outside of the envelope. During the Civil War, illustrated stationery was used to express the sender's sentiments. In the North, envelopes bearing patriotic illustrations appeared before hostilities had broken out. Soon after the war began, Southern stationers quickly marketed a variety of patriotic envelopes picturing flags, cannons, political leaders, soldiers, and other war–related themes.

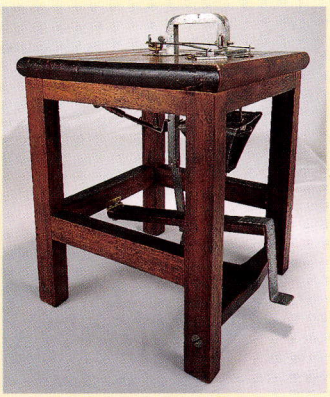
Innovations

Innovation is central to the character and development of American history. Those competing to "build a better mousetrap" look for machines and systems that enhance or replace human labor. Postal officials constantly seek ways to improve delivery systems and speed mail processing and transportation. The search for better and faster mail delivery has been a cornerstone of postal history and has helped shape the development of both the rail and aviation industries.



In the early days of airmail service, the lack of ground lighting made night flying impossible. Congressional support hinged on making airmail service work around the clock. To save the service, Carl F. Egge, general superintendent of the Airmail Service, and J. V. Magee, an illumination engineer, organized a lighting system along the airmail routes. Small acetylene gas beacons, visible for 10 miles, were installed along the route. Every emergency landing field had a rotating beacon mounted on a 50–foot tower. The beacon made six rotations a minute. Regular landing fields were equipped with high–intensity lamps that dispersed light across the field, and white boundary lights were placed every 150 to 300 feet around the perimeter. Large buildings in the area were floodlighted, and nearby high–rise obstacles were equipped with red lights. ◀

Prior to the mid–1850s, envelope-folding machines were imported from Europe. The first patent for an envelope folding machine in the United States, number 6055, was issued January 23, 1849 to J. K. Park and C. S. Watson of New York City. In the early years of the Patent Office, inventors were required to include working models of their inventions with patent applications. This model was filed with the application on April 21, 1848, in the Patent Office at Washington, D.C.

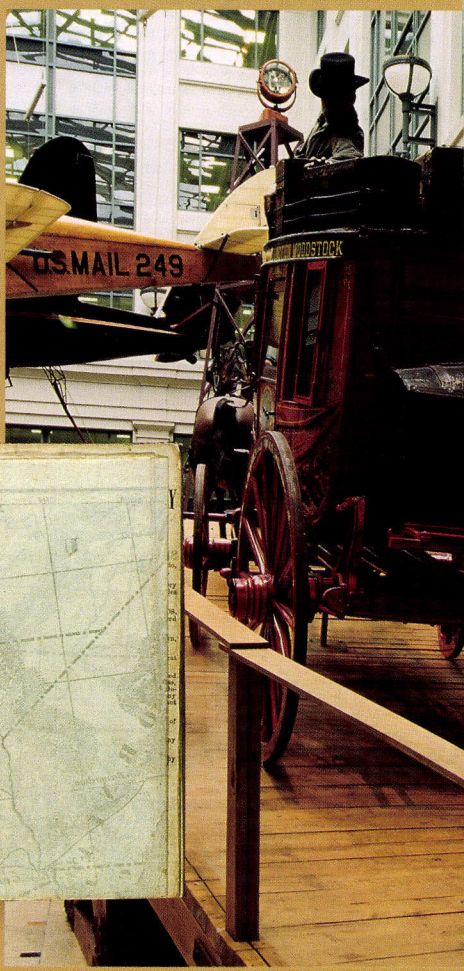


Until the 1980s, the postal service chose its trucks from available models, even though its requirements were often more demanding. When the time came to replace its fleet of thousands of World War II surplus jeeps, the postal service started from scratch. They presented their criteria for the perfect postal vehicle to manufacturers, challenging them to create such a truck. The result is the Long–Life Vehicle. These boxy mail trucks quickly became a staple of city delivery.

Pioneers and Adventurers

Americans pride themselves on their ability to overcome just about any obstacle. This spirit has been the catalyst for a number of postal service achievements. From overland to airmail, the passion for adventure and a determination to chart a new path have steered the development of America's postal service.

The first overland stage line to establish a route from the Mississippi River to California was the 1858 Butterfield Overland Mail. This route was critical to maintaining governmental access to the west and moving mail on a regular basis. Its establishment paved the way for a future railroad. Books such as this were given to John Butterfield's agents, drivers, and station masters. Each book contained a map of the route, timetables, and room for drivers' notes of passengers and cargo. ▶



THE
OVERLAND MAIL COMPANY
RUN A
SEMI-WEEKLY LINE OF STAGES,
CARRYING THE U. S. MAILS,
From Memphis, Tenn., and St. Louis, Mo.,
To San Francisco, Cal.,
VIA
Fort Smith, Ark., Sherman, Texas, Fort Belknap, Fort Chadbourne, El Paso, Mesilla, Tucson, Fort Yuma, Los Angeles and Visalia.
Also, a DAILY LINE, from St. Louis to Springfield, Mo., and a TRI-WEEKLY LINE from San Francisco to Los Angeles.
Also, a SEMI-WEEKLY LINE of STEAMERS, carrying mails, freight and passengers from Little Rock to Fort Smith, Ark.
Through Tickets
Can be had, on application, at any of the Agencies of the Company in the above named places.
Principal Office, in New York, at the
AMERICAN EXPRESS BUILDING,
HUDSON, JAY AND STAPLE STREETS.
JOHN BUTTERFIELD,
President and General Manager.
ALEXANDER HOLLAND, *Treasurer.*
JOHNSTON LIVINGSTON, *Secretary.*
SUPERINTENDENTS:
TOM CROCKER, Fort Smith, | GILES HAWLEY, Tucson,
A. L. KNOX, San Francisco, | JAMES GLOVER, El Paso,
WM. B. BOOKEY, Fort Yuma, | HENRY HAVEN, Ft. Chadbourne.

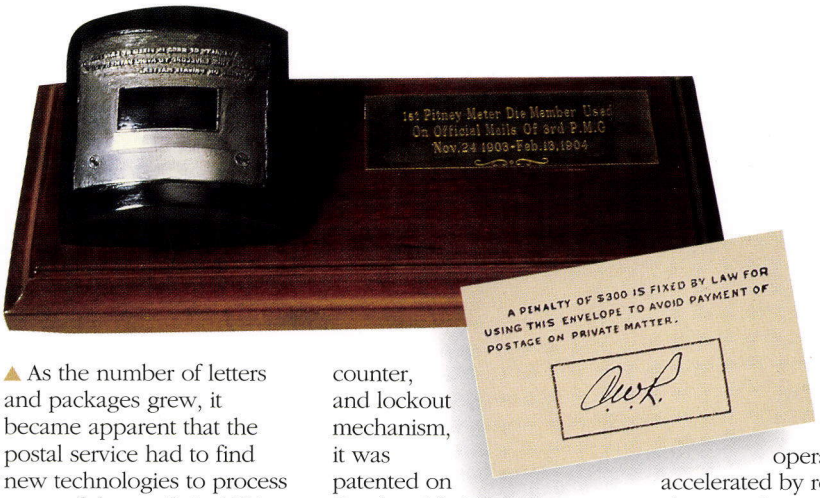
▲ Charles Lindbergh found his greatest fame in 1927 when he completed the first solo flight across the Atlantic. Before that date, Lindbergh had worked as an airmail pilot and received his nickname, "Lucky Lindy," after successfully surviving a number of airmail crashes. After his great success, he served Pan American Airways as a technical advisor on a number of their early passenger flights. This cover was flown by Lindbergh on the airline's inaugural flight between Miami and Cristobal, Canal Zone. In 1934 he autographed the cover for Postmaster General James A. Farley.

Amelia Earhart fell in love with aviation at an early age. In 1928 she became the first woman to cross the Atlantic by plane. Although she was only a passenger on that flight, she soon made her mark in history by flying solo across the Atlantic in 1932. She took off from Canada on Friday, May 20, five years to the day after Charles Lindbergh's solo Atlantic flight. She landed her red Vega in James Gallagher's pasture near Londonderry, Ireland, on Saturday morning, May 21. In 1937 she tried to become the first female pilot to fly around the world. During a flight between New Guinea and Howland Island in the Pacific, her plane vanished. Since her disappearance, Earhart's fate has been the source of much speculation.

Amelia Earhart's brown leather flying suit provided extra warmth through its plaid flannel lining. Pilots would not dare attempt long flights without the protection offered by fur, wool, or flannel-lined suits. Early airplanes offered scant protection against harsh elements, especially the icy cold air at 20,000 feet. ▶

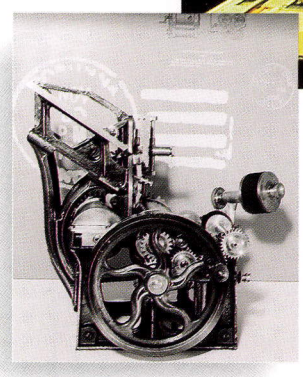
Handling the Mail

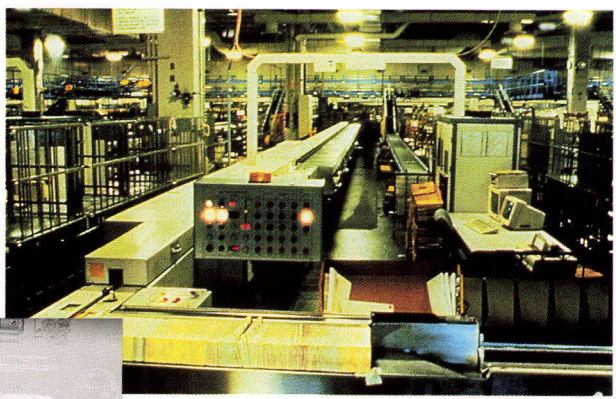
It takes a lot of work to get each piece of mail to its final destination. First, stamps or meter strips are used to show that the mail's journey has been paid for. Then the mail is usually taken to a processing center where the stamps are canceled to prevent their reuse. Mail is marked and sorted by computers and transported to a sorting center near its destination where it is sorted again before finally being given to a letter carrier.


1st Pitney Meter Die Member Used
On Official Mails Of 3rd P.M.G
Nov.24 1903-Feb.19,1904
A PENALTY OF $300 IS FIXED BY LAW FOR
USING THIS ENVELOPE TO AVOID PAYMENT OF
POSTAGE ON PRIVATE MATTER.

▲ As the number of letters and packages grew, it became apparent that the postal service had to find new technologies to process some of that mail. In 1901 Arthur Pitney developed his metered mailing process. Consisting of a manual crank, chain action, printing die, counter, and lockout mechanism, it was patented on October 14, 1902. He later patented an electronically-operated model that automatically sealed and stacked the envelopes and printed the postage. The entire operation was accelerated by replacing chains with gearing. This model was tested by the Post Office Department from 1903 to 1904 and deemed a success.

The oldest surviving production model of a hand-driven canceling machine used in the United States was produced by Thomas Leavitt. Although tagged "1879" when it was submitted to the patent office, its invention relied upon an earlier model frame used in 1877. This machine could cancel only postal cards, which had a uniform size and thickness. ▶

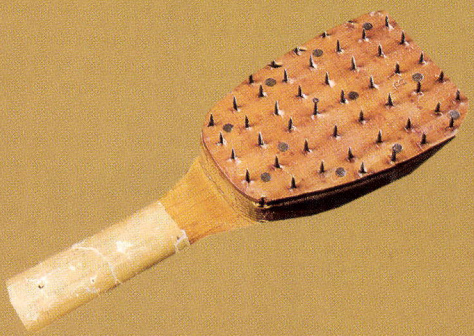




▲ The huge volume of mail taken to postal centers around the country is processed through a serious of computer–operated high-speed, high-volume machines. The most amazing are the Optical Character Readers, or OCRs. These machines read addresses, spray bar code numbers on the envelopes, and do preliminary sorting of mail at a rate of 30,000 an hour.

The Rare and The Beautiful

The National Postal Museum is home to many rare and beautiful artifacts. Visitors will see a number of interesting items displayed here that cannot be found anywhere else.

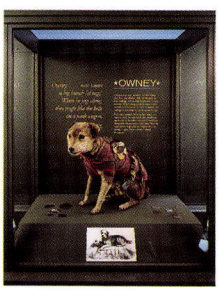


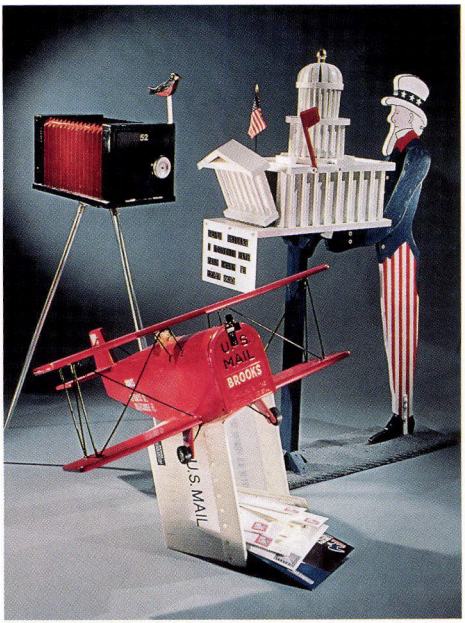
▲ This unusual paddle was used in Montgomery, Alabama, to perforate mail for fumigation as a precaution against yellow fever in about 1890. At that time, the mail was thought to be a means of spreading cholera, smallpox, and yellow fever. Fumigation was performed in many ways, including puncturing each letter with small holes through the use of a paddle such as this and subjecting the mail to the strong, dry heat of sulphur fumes.

▼ This remnant of an Orr and Painter mailbox was found after the great Johnstown flood of 1889. Thousands of people lost their lives in this major disaster, when the collapse of a dam unleashed a wall of water on the western Pennsylvania manufacturing town.

Owney, a stray mutt, wandered into the Albany, New York post office in 1888. The clerks let him stay, and he fell asleep on some mailbags. Owney loved those bags, and he was soon riding mailbags across the country with the Railway Mail Service. In 1895 Owney traveled with mailbags on steamships to Asia and across Europe before returning to Albany. He was beloved by Railway Mail Service clerks, who adopted him as their unofficial mascot.

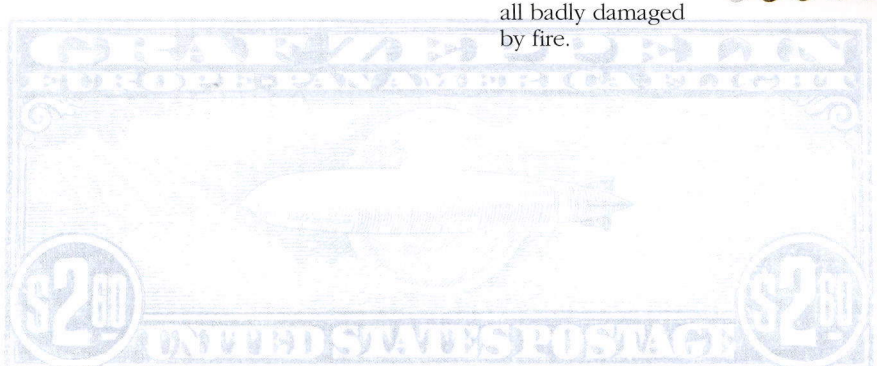
Railway clerks soon began to mark Owney's travels by placing medals and tags on his collar. Postal clerks in Albany saved them each time the dog returned home. Postmaster General John Wanamaker was one of Owney's fans. When he learned that the dog's collar was weighed down by an ever-growing number of tags, he gave Owney a jacket on which to display his "trophies."





▲ Across the nation, people use their mailboxes as a creative outlet. Whether reflecting a business, hobby, or personal whim, folk–art mailboxes brighten up lonely rural roads and suburban front yards.

▲ This postcard was salvaged from the wreckage of the German zeppelin *Hindenburg*. While attempting to land at the U.S. Naval Air Station at Lakehurst, N.J. on May 6, 1937, the Hindenburg struck a mooring mast, burst into flames, and crumpled to the ground. The 357 pieces of mail saved were all badly damaged by fire.



When the Craig, Alaska, post office burned on March 19, 1931, the postal inspector sent to investigate the fire scooped up some remains of the building and enclosed them in a jar for his report. ▼

▲ When he donated the Hope Diamond to the Smithsonian Institution in 1958, jeweler Harry Winston sent the fabled gem by registered first–class mail. This package carried the diamond on its trip from New York City to Washington, D.C. Of the $145.29 mailing price, only $2.44 was for postage. The balance was the insurance fee for $1 million.

Library and Research Center
With over 40,000 volumes and manuscripts, the museum's new Library Research Center is among the world's largest philatelic and postal history research facilities. The 6,000–square–foot library offers researchers the opportunity to browse through current philatelic and postal magazines and newsletters. Scholars have the opportunity to conduct research on many topics from the library's outstanding special collections. Operated by the Smithsonian Institution Libraries, the National Postal Museum Library and Research Center is open to the public by appointment from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday. For appointments, call (202) 633-9370.

Collection and Conservation Work
The museum's registrar, collections, and conservation staff are responsible for the care and management of this enormous collection. Since its inception in 1886, the collection has grown through gifts from individuals and foreign governments, and occasional purchases and transfers from government agencies. The collection now stands at over 16 million items, making it one of the largest collections in the Smithsonian Institution. In addition to stamps, covers, and postal stationery, the collection includes vehicles used to transport the mail, mailboxes, mailbags, historical documents, handstamps, and metering and canceling machines.

Educational and Public Programs
The National Postal Museum provides daily guided tours to adults and school groups. Curriculum materials are available to schools throughout the nation by contacting the Education Office. Throughout the year, public programs and workshops are available that further interpret the diversity of our national postal history. Contact the Education Office for a schedule of tours, programs, or available publications. Call the office at (202) 357-2991 (voice), or (202) 633-9849 (TTY), or write to:

Education Department
National Postal Museum
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560

The National Postal Museum would like to thank the following organizations and individuals for generously lending the museum some of the objects that appear in this book:

Frank & Theresa Brooks: Airplane mailbox

John Conneely and Mariellen Malouin: Muffler man mailbox

Jesse Headley: Uncle Sam mailbox

John G. Hoff: Pony Express collection

T.O. Madden, Jr. & family: Letters and photographs

National Air & Space Museum: Wiseman-Cooke, DeHavilland and Stinson Reliant airmail planes; airmail beacon

National Museum of American History: Telegraph crossarm, belt plates, sword and folding chair; Thompson submachine gun

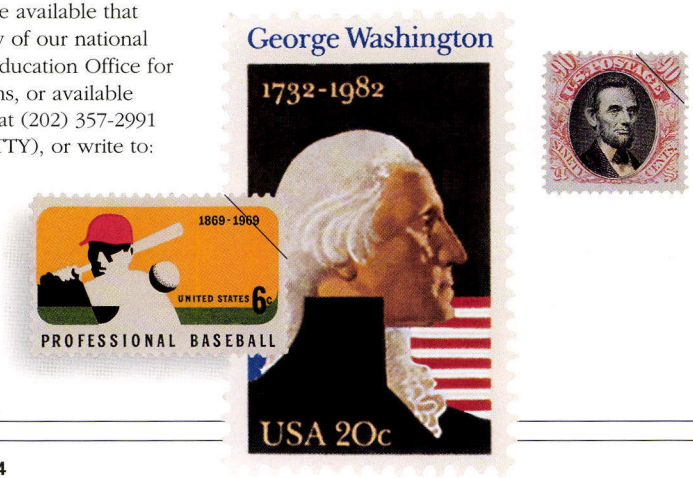
Dr. Charles A. Raugh: Civil War field desk

Jeanette Cantrell Rudy: Duck stamps

Frank Scheer, Railway Mail Service Library: .38 caliber pistol

United States Postal Service: Benjamin Franklin statue

Francis A. Wironen: Camera mailbox



Photographs courtesy of:

Larry Gates:	pages 64-65	duck stamps
Eric Long:	pages 66-67	letters and photographs
	page 82	mailboxes
James O'Donnell:	page 29	rural letter
	pages 52-53	stamps
	page 65	exhibit gallery
	page 69	war mail
	page 72	censored envelopes
	page 73	patriotic envelopes
Dane A. Penland:	page 2	historic lobby
Charles Phillips:	pages 10-11	steamship model
	pages 12-13	ship model, pioneers and their letters
	page 14	exhibit
	page 15	exhibit
	page 17	*The Central Route*
	pages 20-21	*Customers and Communities* gallery
	pages 24-25	*Looking for Innovations in the Cities*
	page 26	*Designing the Perfect Mailbox*
	page 32	bottom photograph
	page 33	creating a mail piece, view of second station
	page 39	robberies case
	page 40	railway mail crane
	page 45	mailster
	page 46	Wiseman-Cooke airplane, flight suit
	pages 48-49	DeHavilland airplane, Stinson-Reliant airplane
	page 74	airmail beacon
	page 75	patent model
	page 81	Owney
Richard Strauss	page 6	*Starting the System* entrance, postal road
	page 7	Benjamin Franklin statue
	page 9	*The Post and the Press*
	page 10	*Creating Postal Routes*
	page 15	mud wagon
	page 18	exhibit case
	page 53	*Rarities Vault*
Richard Vargas:	page 17	*Romance vs. Reality*
	page 18	Civil War field desk
	page 28	*Reaching Rural America*
	page 29	sorting bag
	page 33	*Were do you live,* testing mail order knowledge
	page 70	Alaskan mail sled
	page 80	perforation paddle
Jake Wyman:	page 32	Gallery entrance and top photograph
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